



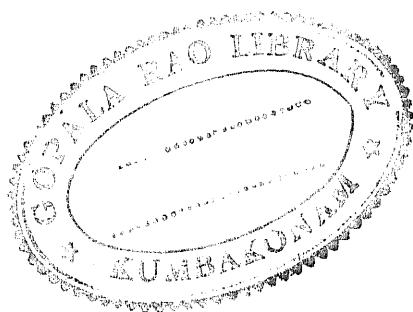
After the Rhine drop. Rendezvous of Airborne Troops. Author in glasses.

80  
AFTER THESE  
MANY QUESTS

by

MARSLAND GANDER

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MACDONALD: LONDON



## PREFACE

VARIOUS suggestions have been made to me, from time to time, of suitable subjects for authorship. I have been advised, for instance, to explain "How to Become a Journalist." Another idea was "How to Make a Living Without Working." The merits of this second title were urged most persuasively. I was assured that it would make any book a certain "best seller."

Some misguided persons even seemed to think that the second could be used as a sub-title for the first. Certainly, to judge from the inquiries I receive, many young people see in journalism a straight and easy road to fortune.

My own ideas pointed to India twenty-five years ago, in the last phases of the British raj, and, alternatively, to a full, uncensored account of my war adventures.

When mulling over these various possibilities, I happened to read W. A. Darlington's entertaining book *I Do What I Like*. It struck me that one solution of my problem lay in an autobiography. Though I cannot, with any confidence, tell young people today what is the *best* way to become a journalist, I can at least tell them how *I* became one. It also seemed to me that to like your job is even better than getting a living without working, and most journalists *do* like their job.

Moreover, an autobiography would give me the chance of filling in the uncensored parts of *Long Road to Leros*, and continuing the story of my war corresponding up to the armistice.

There was small danger of doubling on Mr. Darlington, for, though we have lived in the same half-century and we both work, in different specialist capacities, for the same newspaper, we have really existed in totally different worlds. He is a product of public school and university; I, of free education and professional apprenticeship. He lives in, and



for, the theatre, while I have watched the drama of life in many parts of the globe.

Some may consider that, when it comes to the war, I have paid over-much attention to war correspondents and their work. My reason is that World War II was the first in which the uniformed correspondent obtained full recognition. I have never sympathised with the view that because there were numbered in thousands, they were any less romantic or enterprising than their forerunners who rode horses instead of using parachutes, and who wrote with quill pen instead of typewriters. Readers should not, however, imagine that because I write of what I know best that I exaggerate the importance of the correspondent compared with the fighting man.

LEONARD MARSLAND GANDER

*Barnes, January, 1949.*

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# AFTER THESE MANY QUESTS

## CHAPTER ONE

### TWELFTH MAN

MY EARLIEST recollection is painful and violent. The world struck me as a hard place. I was trying to climb a step-ladder, slipped and banged my head on concrete. Wailing with fright and anguish, I rushed to Mother, who was usually only too sympathetic. On this occasion she seemed to think it was entirely my own fault.

As I rubbed the spot and wept, I conceived this world as a giant conspiracy to prevent me from doing what I wanted to do—a place where condign punishment was inflicted for no good reason. I did not perceive that this was a minute incident in the martyrdom of man and that, needlessly acting the metaphor, I was starting at the bottom of the ladder in a vague aspiration to climb. It seems to me now that my life has been a series of slightly more complicated variations on this theme.

I must have been about four years old at the time, and the memory struggles through a shabby, grey veil. We lived in the delectable East London district of Bow, in a mean street with the high-sounding name of Malmesbury Road. Man's perverted genius for creating a stony wilderness out of the fair countryside is well illustrated in Bow.

But Malmesbury Road had more than an elegant name. It was in the respectable, or aspidistra zone. Each house had its aspidistra in the parlour window. As a further mark of superiority it had an avenue of plane trees flaunting

defiant branches amid the grime, smoke and factory smog. The identical cells of houses huddled close, and, in the prolific days, all were grossly overcrowded. No doubt they are still overcrowded, but for slightly different reasons. They comprised two storeys, with a bow window in front for show and a small back-yard for the hardier varieties of flower and fowls. There was also a small glass-roofed excrescence dignified with the description of "conservatory."

By coincidence, the Gander family described so wittily in Eric Linklater's book *Ripeness is All* has distinct points of resemblance to mine. I first met Linklater, as I should presently tell, twenty-five years ago in Bombay, and should think that our acquaintanceship suggested the name. The father of his *Ripeness* family was Jonathan, my father James. Jonathan was a toffee, mine a fire-hose manufacturer. Both married twice, both had large families. The direct similarity ends. The *Ripeness* family included George "who drank and who was now living obscurely in India or the United States; opinion, though unanimous about his evil nature, differed as to his whereabouts." My name is Leonard.

The chief difference between the *Ripeness* Ganders and the real ones is financial. Fire-hose did not produce a fortune and there was no "stork race," to see who could raise the largest family in five years and thus inherit the money. We had migrated to Malmesbury Road from even more dismal surroundings, but, as inverted snobbery is fashionable today, I can record with absurd pride that I was born on June 27, 1902, in West India Dock Road, Limehouse. It would be equally satisfying, today, to claim descent from some notorious blackguard. The truth is that the lineage of the Gander family is almost as obscure as that of the average American negro.

The best I can do is to refer to Genseric, King of the Vandals, who sacked Rome in A.D. 455. Gander is an Anglo-Saxon name, and Genseric, according to Professor Ern Weekley, the well-known authority on surnames, is the earliest form, in high German, of the low German Gander.

About twenty years later, the first division of Saxons under Ella and Cissa, settled in Sussex, and probably

brought the first Ganders with them. Today, still, there are more Ganders in Sussex than in any other English county.

Leaping the centuries, we come to a Joseph Gander, who, in 1703, wrote a treatise in which he asserted and vindicated "the glory of her sacred Majesty Queen Anne in the Royal Navy and her absolute sovereignty as Empress of the Sea." He also wrote another work, insisting that "the glory of this kingdom doth depend upon a national fishery." Whether he was an ancestor or not, I cannot be certain, but as we are a seafaring and pedagogic family, I should think it likely. Today his works are listed in the great index of the British Museum, rubbing shoulders with mine, and two technical books under the names of my half-brothers Allan and Sandford.

My father was a shoemaker's son and his mother was Irish—Mary Ann Driscoll. The Irish streak may account for the Bohemian cheerfulness of the crowded household which I joined as the eleventh surviving child, being christened Leonard Marsland. The Marsland came from my mother—Ellen Marsland—daughter of a Birmingham business man. Father's first wife, daughter of a merchant service captain, had left him a sorrowing widower with nine children.

Mother was one of the most courageous and devoted little women this world has seen. She did not know the meaning of physical fear. My first lesson in human prejudices was to notice the Cockney hostility roused by her slight Midland accent. I was her chief weakness and was shockingly spoiled.

She was nearly forty when she took over the management of this large ready-made family, having the help of one wretched slavey, paid a few shillings a week, plus the desultory efforts of her acquired daughters. Soon there were two additional drones, my brother Stanley, a survivor of twins, and myself. My birth—on June 27, 1902—must have been difficult, for there is a mark on my forehead today probably caused by forceps.

The country was gay, from end to end, with flags, bunting and illuminations. This had nothing to do with the obscure happenings in Limehouse. The day had been chosen for King Edward VII's coronation, but, as the King fell ill, the



event was postponed. I was born on a Friday, and according to the old rhyme, "Friday's child is loving and giving," in contrast to Saturday's child who "works hard for his living."

*The Daily Telegraph* of that day, filled with practically nothing but the King's illness and the unfortunate postponement of his coronation, also carried an advertisement headed in large black type "PLAGUE OF NERVES." It would have given the puking infant a good clue to the kind of world he was entering.

Father was then a leather and india-rubber merchant, in partnership with his elder brother Richard. The firm, which also made fire-hose and various mechanical gadgets for ships, operated as a family affair in a combined shop, factory and dwelling-house. One side faced West India Dock Road and the other Limehouse Causeway. There were seven fairly large rooms above the shop in which the family lived and slept. The whole place was a twig on the dying tree of Victorian private enterprise. It was a strange growth. There was a workshop in which seven employees made hose, and a water-trough in which they tested it. The children were apt to spread everywhere, like chickens in a farmyard, among the various enchanting objects. Sandford, the oldest and most daring, occasionally had a surreptitious bath in the trough. Ironically, the whole place was eventually destroyed in a Hitler fire blitz.

It was Heartbreak House run by the Cheeryble Brothers. Any relative who really tried could get a job. There had been a passing phase of prosperity when the whole family moved to the countrified district of Leytonstone. When I arrived, the rot had finally set in, accelerated by fluctuations in the price of rubber, and the migration of a big Milwall supply firm to the north. Our affairs crumbled towards collapse.

Limehouse, despite its squalor and poverty, was a romantic setting for this queer shop-household. It was redolent of the sea and exciting foreign parts, of joss sticks, Chinese crackers, and hidden opium dens. Not far away were Sailors' Homes, the lodgings of lascars, Scandinavians, and South Sea Islanders. Slant-eyed Chinese shuffled past our

doors, awesome by daylight, and made infinitely more sinister by the guttering street lighting at nights.

Father, who had been strikingly handsome in his youth, with Gander beak and flowing beard, had grown portly, rubicund and benign. He usually wore a top-hat and moved with slow and stately tread. He visited the lascars from time to time to give them copies of the *Boy's Own Paper*, the pictures in which caused them to grin and chatter with simian glee. He also loved yarning with the various seafaring characters who infested Limehouse. One of the most interesting was a Mr. Beckwith, a cable ships' superintendent, who, at one time, had been chief engineer of the *Great Eastern*. He claimed to have supplied Jules Verne with a great deal of the information used in *The Floating City*.

Papa had varied interests. It was his boast that he went to work at the age of twelve, and that, consequently, he was largely self-educated. Yet there was absolutely nothing of what one might call the "working man" about him. He was intensely interested in education and every branch of knowledge, yet, apparently, had no money to spare for it. He used to take his beloved brood to art galleries, ancient buildings, museums, and lectures. He taught all the boys to play chess and was specially keen on astronomy. Sir Robert Ball's works fascinated him and he was fond of retailing astronomical figures to his slightly bored hearers—the more noughts the better. He believed in taking full advantage of the free educational facilities offered by the State, and we all had to try to win our way by scholarship.

In the light of modern educational argument, it is noteworthy that his method was singularly successful. It produced two B.Sc. degrees. Every member of the family did reasonably well by worldly standards.

I myself remember nothing of the Limehouse days. It is certain, however, that I never ran about with bare or frozen feet. Boots and stockings were one of our marks of superiority and respectability. How far Limehouse affected my character and ambitions Freud only knows. Certainly it influenced other members of the family. Sandford and Stanley became marine engineers, and Bernard, after reaching London University and Greenwich by a succession

Maritime Customs. He married in Shanghai, starting a flourishing branch of the family there.

Through all vicissitudes, the moral and ethical standards of our home were puritanical—excessively so. As far as I know, my father's only vices were a taste for saveloys and snuff-taking. No intoxicating liquor was allowed in the house. Cigarette smoking was severely discouraged, and when my dear mother contracted this habit, as a solace for sorely-tried nerves, it was a constant source of mild bickering. It meant clandestine smokes in the bedroom, with frantic and quite futile newspaper flapping afterwards. No gambling of any sort was allowed and playing cards could not be produced on Sundays. Every Sunday afternoon we all had to troop off to Sunday school.

I am sometimes amused to hear people discussing the "East End" as if it had a monopoly of vice, wrong living and all forms of criminality. They confuse poverty with wickedness. I always remember how astonished I was on first reading the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. I could not understand why to tell the truth was regarded as something specially commendable. It never entered my head to tell a lie. My parents had inculcated the idea that falsehood was unthinkable.

Father also had his own methods of curing childish fears. I was afraid of the dark till one night he persuaded me with kind and encouraging words to get an orange from a drawer in the terrifying upstairs darkness where he had put it. I went, with madly beating heart, pursued by all the ghosts in creation, but I came headlong down the stairs, with the prize, and lifting spirits.

When we moved to Malmesbury Road, the burden of supporting the family had been shifted to the elder children. Grace and Ethel had relieved the pressure by getting married. Sandford was at sea, contributing regularly. Blanche and Elsie took up teaching. My youngest half-sister, Evelyn, a saintly character with a weak constitution, began training as a nursery governess.

with asphalt playgrounds and games like a prison. It fell to the lot of brother Stanley to take me, and some even smaller and more troublesome urchins from next door, to and from this forbidding building, making sure that we did not associate with any street-arabs or become in any other way polluted by the *hoi polloi*.

The most dangerous shoal for our navigator was a small sweet-shop where little Willie, the plutocrat from next door, always wanted to stop to buy a farthing's worth of something or other. He always liked a great quantity, the coloured seed-like objects called hundreds and thousands being his favourite. Sometimes he would grow reckless and buy big gob-stoppers. Once he asked for "A farthing's worth of break-it-up-small please." The trouble was that Willie's wavering transactions were apt to make us late. I never seemed to have any money or to worry about it in the least. The great thing was that Willie was respectable in a most distinguished way—his father was a policeman.

My days at Malmesbury Road were illumined by a sweet person called Miss Williams who had dedicated her life to teaching East End children. Her kindness, unfailing good temper, and gentle persistence with our education are tender memories. I remember vividly the great tins of sweets she kept to reward her brightest, most deserving pupils.

Incidentally she was also my Sunday-school teacher. Under her persevering direction we, who had never seen a green field in our young lives, sang "There is a green hill far away," and various other hymns. She constructed models with sand and clay, and little animals to depict the Holy Land and illustrate our Lord's teachings. Once, with the cunning connivance of my family, she taught me to sing "Where the bee sucks, there suck I, tra la la."

Standing on a kitchen chair at home I piped this with astounding verve and confidence. Alas, when the public performance began I panicked and my thin treble trailed off into nothingness. I broke down in tears, discrediting my new sailor suit and Nelson's race.

Another occasion that sticks in my memory is my sudden

awareness of the beauty of flowers when, with inexpressible pride, I took a fuchsia to a harvest festival celebration. I thought this potted plant the loveliest thing I had ever seen.

But my days were darkened by the irreverent mockery of my fellow collegians. They were in the habit of forming a circle round me and chanting "Goosey, goosey Gander," until I obliged them by bursting into tears, which happened with deplorable frequency. Then they changed the chant to "Cry-baby Harding."

It was some time before I discovered that the way to end this misery was to make a fierce rush at the ring-leader, without any seriously belligerent intent. This almost invariably sent all my tormentors flying and earned me an undeserved reputation of being tough. It was not necessary to strike anybody at this kindergarten stage.

Brother Stanley and I were not allowed to rake the streets with the local arabs. Once I escaped Mother's vigilance and went on a long forage collecting match-sticks. I assembled my hoard on the outside window-sill and was counting them out, miser fashion, when Mother, with a horrified shriek, swooped down and confiscated the lot.

About this time sister Evelyn grew friendly with Daisy Lansbury, daughter of the famous George. The Lansbury family, almost as numerous as our own, lived in St. Stephen's Road, Bow, next to a saw-mill and veneer works which, I understand, was owned by Mr. Lansbury's father-in-law. Friendship between the two families waxed and flourished. Daisy and Evelyn used to organise pram-pushing expeditions in Victoria Park, the younger Lansbury children Connie, Violet and Eric being about the same ages as Stanley and I.

The Lansburys seemed altogether more affluent than us. Their house was bigger and they held parties which frightened me to death but nevertheless impressed me greatly with their apparent wealth and influence. Above all, they had a pianola and I was permitted to pedal away at it, imagining myself a Paderewski, to heart's content.

Daisy, fresh-complexioned and lovely, was a vision of delight to my young eyes. But Papa, though a good-natured and tolerant man, was by no means so delighted.

The Lansburys did not come within his orbit of respectability. He was a Conservative and a staunch Imperialist—did we not have to bear huge Union Jacks to school on Empire Day? George Lansbury was something so dreadful that we hardly dared mention the word above a whisper—he was a Socialist. Moreover, and this was so appalling that it was kept a secret from the youngest children, he HAD BEEN IN PRISON. This was not all. He was supporting women's suffrage and it was believed that his daughters were mixed up with this infamous movement led by dangerous and fanatical viragos. Even then, however, I think I could distinguish between imprisonment for a political as distinct from a criminal offence.

Papa was probably have put his foot down firmly but for the obvious virtue and beauty of Daisy. Another powerful factor was that George, and most of the family, were devout Christians. They regularly attended services at the old Norman church at Bow, the sole surviving link with the Stratford-atte-Bow of Chaucer where the prioress learnt her French so "fetisly." I remember being desperately bored by these same services, and more interested in the sprawling, unconventional attitudes struck by the senior Lansbury, as he listened to the high-pitched intoning of harassed Mr. Kitcat, the vicar.

To me George Lansbury was a loud husky voice framed in a bowler hat and sidewhiskers. The blood of martyrs coursed in his veins, for he was never happy unless fighting for his ideals and, whether right or wrong, championing the underdog. I always felt slightly uneasy when transfixed by his dark, benevolent eyes. It seemed that he was not interested in me but was looking through and beyond me at vague abstract things like Humanity, Socialism, and Pacificism. We never saw him at the children's parties, and he figured in my private pantheon as a minor deity.

Actually Mr. Lansbury's aloofness was due to his intense preoccupation with politics. He was a teetotaller and a non-smoker but certainly not a kill-joy, for he believed ardently in everybody enjoying life and its good things to the full. What always puzzled me so much was this: why

pitches were roped off and nurtured during the winter, but the majority were extremely rough. I often wonder how Bradman would have fared on such wickets, on which the path of the ball was quite unpredictable. My own scores varied from nought to three and, on completing an erratic innings, I used to thank my lucky stars that I had not been maimed for life. After facing a demon bowler on Wanstead Flats, one felt afraid of nothing.

A slightly longer walk brought us to the rural seclusion of Wanstead Park, with its ornamental waters and winding, picturesque Heron Pond. It was a happy hunting ground for conkers and acorns in the autumn and a paradise for slides and skating during the winter.

I was transferred to Water Lane Elementary School, run by West Ham Borough Council, and with self-conscious pride took my place with about sixty other boys in Standard I of the Boys' Department, leaving the Infants' Department, scornfully, for ever. We scratched away on slates, rubbing out our efforts with filthy bits of rag that were nominally supposed to be wetted with water, but were, more often, spat upon. My fellow students cannot have been very brilliant, for I was easily top of the class. The trouble was that the best pupils were swiftly translated to higher and higher spheres, regardless of age. This soon got me floundering out my depth, dealing with such horrors as vulgar fractions, parsing and analysing. It also led, in due course, to a scholarship class run by the tubby and irascible head-teacher. All the classrooms opened out of a main hall where the Head sat at a raised desk. When he banged twice on his bell, those shivering victims for whom the bell tolled had to leave their classrooms and line up before him. He would then begin to plumb the full depths of our abysmal ignorance, growing more and more irritable with each fresh revelation of our utter incompetence.

At home I became a voracious reader, and was perpetually sitting in the corner of the basement sitting-room absorbed in some book. West Ham Municipal Library happened to be almost opposite, and I speedily ran through the whole gamut of dog-eared literature for boys. E. Nesbit, Ballantyne, Henty, Talbot Baines Reid and Captain Marryat led

to Dickens, H. G. Wells and Conan Doyle. Among my greatest treasures were some old bound volumes of *Chums* and the *Boy's Own Paper*. Fashions in boys' literature had, however, changed in the ten to twenty years that separated my schooldays from those of my older brothers and sisters. They were inclined to deplore my passionate absorption in the *Gem* and the *Magnet*.

Nevertheless, I lived happy, hilarious hours with Tom Merry and Co. and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of that improbable establishment St. Jim's. Harry Wharton and Co., of Greyfriars, were second favourites. Stanley and I thought that the *Gem* was much superior to the *Magnet*, possibly because of the aristocratic D'Arcy who was constantly complaining about a bulldog that had "no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs." I cannot imagine what we would have said had we known that the two weekly stories in the *Gem* and the *Magnet* respectively were both written by the same person, namely Charles Hamilton. He wrote 1,500,000 words a year and earned £2,500 for it.

The moral tone of these stories was high, and they were witty. What if a whole line was taken up with "Yaroo!" and another line with "Ha! ha! ha!"? There was plenty of cheap newsprint in those days and it made for easy reading. I have never recaptured the feeling of pleasurable expectation that I had each week as Wednesday approached and the prospect of another instalment of the adventures of Tom Merry and Co. In great anxiety I rushed round to a one-eyed newsagent in Vicarage Lane several times before the *Gem* with its blue cover and delicious smell of fresh print was actually delivered. It has taken thirty years for Hamilton's creations to become classical; in my boyhood they were hardly respectable.

I also devoured a weekly called *The Boy's Friend*, printed on green paper. Its chief claim to fame is a remarkably prophetic serial called "Kaiser or King?" written many years before World War I and predicting a death struggle between the German and British empires. But soaring high above this in a poetic splendour, which I was dimly beginning to appreciate, was the Shakespeare we learnt at school. The heroic speeches moved me to quivering exaltation.



Young aspirants to journalism frequently ask me how to start in the profession. The truth is that there is no road, and despite all attempts of the National Union of Journalists to declare it a "closed shop," it can be entered at all ages and by many ways. My own route will be explained as this narrative proceeds. What is not so easy to explain is how the journalistic bug entered my blood. Clearly, I had acquired writing ambitions at the age of nine when, in 1911, brother Stanley and I founded a family magazine which was destined to become a combined operation involving both the Gander and Lansbury families, as well as the Lansburys' circle of Socialist friends. Its title was *The L and S*—made it sound more like a railway line than a magazine. I suppose the L came first out of deference to my juniority. There was, at first, only one copy, handwritten, and this was passed round free of charge. Later it was typed by Daisy Lansbury.

I perceive, looking at the earliest copy still preserved, that I have written my autobiography once before. It was called "My History" and here is an extract:

"For some time I flutted about and then returned to my nest. Imagine my surprise when I beheld it occupied by a huge unwieldy thing that let out a awful sound. At first I was terrified but gathered my courage and approached it. I asked it politely to get out. It made a dash at me but I got out of the way. . . . For a short time it watched me panting while I cowered in the shelter of a lilac bush much frightened. . . . I was frustrated. I was in an awkward position and did not know how to get out of it. Now I see how stupid I was not to flutter off at once. . . ."

I now see quite clearly that if I had *flutted* off at once I should have ended up quite happily and swiftly on the optimistic note of Lord Waterlogged's "Bob's yer flippin' uncle."

"My History" only lasted for three instalments, as I grew extremely bored with the helpless, fluffy little fledgling that was quite incapable of dealing with any dramatic situation in a creditable way.

In my crabbed nine-year-old hand there is a bombastic challenge on the title page, coupled with a reckless offer.

"All Readers who can find 50 mistacks in this Number will Receive Heartiest Congratulations."

Papa had a contribution, which, I fancy, he may have copied from somewhere but I cannot trace the quotation. It was entitled "The Ocean" and read:

*Beautiful, sublime and glorious,  
Wild, majestic, foaming free,  
Over time itself victorious,  
Image of eternity.  
Such art thou, stupendous ocean.  
But, if overwhelmed by thee,  
Can one think, without emotion,  
What must thy Creator be?*

Most of the stories, I confess, seemed to be profoundly influenced by the literature we were reading at the time. For instance, I embarked on a long serial called "In the Wilds of Brazil" which bore an uncanny resemblance to Ballantyne's *Martin Rattler*.

Violet Lansbury, who was about my age and made a great impression upon my susceptible heart, showed her idealistic strain and an appreciation of human rights in a contribution called "Indians." It opened:

*Rough are the Indians,  
But they are brave and true.  
Their object is to hold possessions  
In their own lands, too.*

Later Violet developed Communist sympathies and went to Russia, where she married and lived for twelve years. She is now back in this country, married again, and an ardent member of the party.

One of the most prophetic contributions to *The L and S* is a story of mine called "In Deadly Peril." It begins:

“It was a wintry night and the snow was thick upon the ground as I, a war correspondent, tramped on towards Salonica. . . . I had had no luck, so far, being unable to get to the fighting area.”

As a severely condensed account of my first two years of war corresponding in World War II, this last sentence takes some beating.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PINING SCHOOLBOY

ONE WEEK in the summer of 1914 I faced a personal crisis within the major one of Europe rushing unconsciously towards war. I quaked my way through an examination for the Water Lane Higher Elementary School. This offered an education of approximately secondary level for a period of three years, with a bursary of £10 in the third year. When confronted with the arithmetic paper I almost died of heart-failure, and afterwards, comparing notes with other entrants, found that I had only got five and a half sums right out of ten.

Nevertheless, owing to a reasonable showing in the English and General Knowledge papers, I scraped into the school, last but one of the successful candidates. Incidentally, at the first examination in the H.E. (as we called it) I astonished everybody, myself included, by shooting up to second among forty of these scholarship boys. My performance continued to be slightly erratic. After holding my exalted position for a year, a tendency to play the fool caused me to sink a few places.

The H.E. is interesting as a type of "in-between" school that has now ceased to exist. I learnt more there in three years than I have ever learnt in a similar period before or since. It catered both for boys and girls, but the sexes were strictly segregated, except at the annual Christmas party, when everybody was incredibly self-conscious and we stood about in awkward groups until goaded by the teachers into some game. The teachers were all well qualified. My form-master, for instance, was a Cambridge B.A. The discipline was perfect; the education practical as well as purely academic.

We were taught no classical languages but were given a

good grounding in French, science, English, literature, mathematics, history, geography, shorthand and type-writing. The school had the advantage over some of our smaller private and public schools of being exceptionally well equipped. We learnt handicraft at the local secondary school, by special arrangement, and the tools available would make the average householder green with envy.

My handicraft theory was brilliant; my practice a disaster. This particular branch of our training has completely spoiled me for doing the simplest piece of carpentry at home because I always feel that I have not got the right tools. Even when asked to put a screw in I look contemptuously at the miserable selection of screwdrivers offered.

In spite of my natural incompetence I produced such wonders as a pair of dumb-bells made of *lignum vitae* (what if the middle was as fat as the two ends?), a vegetable crusher, an inkstand, and a mirror frame.

Actually my schooldays at the Higher Elementary School started excellently well from the schoolboys' point of view by not starting at all. The dogs of war were out of the trap and the school buildings had been requisitioned for mobilisation purposes. We were jubilant at being able to swank about in our new red caps, with white ribbon round, for another week without the penalty of work. I was too well versed in "Kaiser or King?" to have the slightest qualm about the result of the war.

When we did finally start school the West Ham battalion of the Essex Regiment continued to use the asphalt playground for drilling, providing a fatal counter-attraction for the idler students. At first they were a rabble dressed in oddly assorted civilian clothes. Then one afternoon they sprang a surprise on the school by swinging into the play-ground, all in khaki, behind a drum and fife band.

Forty boys left their desks in a wild scramble for the windows. The form-master, a Mr. Dudley, smiled indulgently and tugged at his moustache. We glowed with pride and quivered with excitement, and the picture of the front row of drums rising and falling, reflecting the watery East End sunshine, is still fresh in my mind. Many of those

gallant volunteers did not survive the bloody shambles of France and Flanders.

The war was a gloriously romantic background to our schoolwork. Our masters and mistresses regaled us with heroic stories. Then came the Zeppelin terror by night, when, dragged from a warm bed, I sat palpitating in the basement at Romford Road dying to peep through the windows, but sternly forbidden to do so. An anti-aircraft gun was stationed near us and the ringing explosions followed by the screaming whistle of the shells are in my ears now. It was sleepless misery. One night it turned to pure ecstasy. The firing stopped abruptly. There was a prolonged silence but no "all clear" bugle. Then, like the distant murmur in a sea-shell, we heard a sound that swelled slowly into a mighty, universal cheer. All London was shouting because a Zeppelin was falling like a blazing meteor. Nothing could restrain me now from rushing to my upstairs bedroom window where a picture of the infant Christ, eyes turned to Heaven, adorned the wall. I was wild with jubilant relief. No thought of brave men burning like faggots disturbed my rapture. My only bitter and lasting regret was that I was too late to see the show. But I cycled to Cuffley the next day, on a borrowed machine, to annex a piece of the aluminium framework.

I think the war-strain and the disturbed nights must have contributed to the final break-up of my father's health. He died in the autumn of 1915, and it was the first occasion on which I had ever seen my indomitable little mother in tears, distracted with grief, her straight, rebellious brown hair disordered.

To the average boy of thirteen his father's death would be a calamity like the ending of the world. In my case the half-century gap in our ages meant that I had been growing apart. My father was the embodiment of kindness and generosity, proud of his family, passionately devoted to the pursuit of truth and knowledge. Yet he belonged to another age. He was a "character" out of Dickens and, I think, knew it. On our rare seaside holidays, for example, he would discard his habitual town topper and wear a peaked yachting cap—a source of some embarrassment to me. He also

believed in all the Victorian vetoes. For example, though personally intrigued by the new-fangled Bioscope he thought it undesirable for children.

One evening Mother, with the air of a conspirator in the Gunpowder Plot, took Stanley and me to a Bioscope recently established in Stratford Broadway. I was inquiring in a loud voice why it was perpetually raining and why the picture was constantly doubled on the screen, when Mother, in great agitation, suddenly shushed me. She had spotted Papa seated in another row, topper on his knees. We escaped by a back exit.

In contrast with Papa, I had been born into an expanding, freer world, the embryonic Erewhon of Samuel Butler, who had died only a week before my birth unaware that he had, in Professor Joad's words, "thawed the first tiny hole in the icy crust of Victorian morality."

The gap in age was also, I feel, partly responsible for the excessive solicitude which Papa showed for his youngest hopefuls. This took various forms. For instance, he insisted upon attending Stanley's first swimming lessons with a Heath Robinson safety-contraption—a kind of home-made breeches buoy. This caused a minor sensation at Jupp Road Baths. Then he stopped me, despite floods of tears, from reading a comic paper serial called "His Convict Bride."

So, ashamed as I am to confess it, Papa's death brought with it a certain sense of freedom, blended with the passing sadness. Life went on, and its tempo quickened.

At the end of the first year at the H.E. School, all the prizes, with one exception, had been won by an outstanding scholar named Edward Ernest Willis, who was also the biggest and most athletic boy in the form. This dispelled from my mind for ever any idea of equality in mankind. Incidentally Ted Willis is today the managing director of the biggest brush-making and selling organisation in the country—Betterwear. He built this firm up from nothing—or, rather, from an idea in his active mind.

The one exception was the General Progress prize won

Willis, though I doubt whether he would want the books I chose—*Pears Cyclopaedia* and W. H. Kingston's *Peter the Whaler*.

Then the war became abruptly real and cruel. One day the Head, a Mr. F. R. Branch, known as "Twoggy" by a corruption of Twig, told the assembled school, after morning hymns, that our science master, a Mr. Bengough, had been killed in France. Occasional daylight raids started and one of the toy bombs of those days fell with a horrifying explosion a quarter of a mile away. This had one pleasant aftermath for the idlers, myself included. "Twoggy" established a system of "air-raid guards." This meant that two boys, in turn, could dodge lessons for periods of half an hour while they skulked about in the asphalt playground ostensibly looking for hostile aircraft. They were also permitted to play cricket at the nets, if so minded. Though, for the sake of verisimilitude, we gave occasional false alarms the system was a total failure.

Food queues and rationing started, but, apart from the inconvenience of standing in queues when I wanted to be reading Sherlock Holmes's stories, it did not affect me much, for, at the best of times, I had a miserable appetite. My fastidiousness with food nearly drove my mother demented. The only meals I fancied were sausage toad-in-the-hole or fried fish. All the usual childish ailments, and a few more, afflicted me in melancholy succession.

The young pacifists of the 1920-30 period were in the making. Brother Bernard, who, because of the O.T.C. training at London University, had obtained a commission in the Essex Regiment, came home on short leave from the Somme, grey and ill, a shadow of the debonair subaltern who had left an oil-dripping motor-cycle in the upstairs hall. He looked like someone who had been through Hell, and it frightened me. His mud-caked uniform had lost its glamour, even the loaded revolver which he cast so carelessly on the sideboard failed to inspire any confidence now. An inkling that mankind was going through one of its periodical phases of madness began to seep into my mind. Then I went to a *Daily Mail* war exhibition and walked through clammy model trenches, which, coupled with the stories that they



were usually half full of water, depressed me still more. When would it be my turn for the blood-bath?

At fourteen, in the third year at the H.E., I began to earn my living, so to speak, by drawing the 16s. 8d. a month of the bursary, doled out in little packets. When I received my pay packet I immediately raced home and gave the whole lot to Mother. As far as I remembered, I was doled out sixpence a week for pocket-money, but was allowed to apply, with varying success, for further grants-in-aid. Generally the sixpence was ample, for the *Gem* and *Magne* cost one penny each and Sharp's Kreemy toffee was two ounces a penny.

The journalistic germ had by now thoroughly infected my whole system. I had glamorous ideas of a future existence seated dreamily in a sumptuous study, gazing through a casement window at immaculate lawns where fountains "shook their loosening silver," and the wind whispered through ancient elms. Every now and then, I imagined my reveries would be interrupted by the postman delivering sacks full of cheques and fan-mail.

Then I read Philip Gibbs's *Street of Adventure* and had a rude shock. I hated the idea of the buffetings, uncertainties and snubs of a reporter's life. Later Bernard's father-in-law lent me Sir Henry Lucy's *Sixty Years in the Wilderness*, and my ideas had a sharper perspective. When the class was faced with its periodical essay problem, one day, of "What I would like to be," I astonished a derisive assembly of prime ministers, generals, police inspectors, engine drivers and postmen with my firm resolve to be a journalist. Form master Dadley's kindly face twisted into one of his wry smiles. "All right if you could get on a paper like *The Daily Telegraph*," he remarked.

One peculiarity of the H.E. School was that there was no corporal punishment. The worst that could befall was being sent to the headmaster with a report form. My horror of form-filling dates from this ritual. Who ever thought of the scheme was a genius at child psychology. We talked in terrified whispers about "old so-and-so" who had no less than five report forms. Nobody quite knew what happened if you secured a nap hand of these dread documents. It was

generally believed the boy was immediately expelled, this being a mild preliminary to terrors greater than the Spanish Inquisition. The ordeal of standing in the hall while "Twoggy" inspected the crime sheet reduced the toughest characters to cringing cowards. His admonishments, delivered in a squeaky voice, bored into our black souls. As he was deaf he could not hear our muttered excuses which we felt were doubly vain. Then we crawled back to our classroom utterly demoralised. I marvel now at "Twoggy's" moral force and the success of his disciplinary methods. In my recollection, only one boy was expelled, and considering that some had been dredged up from deplorable slums, his achievements are a forceful argument against school beatings.

Masters and mistresses did not always resort to the report form. Their methods of preserving order and obtaining respect differed considerably. For example our French mistress on one occasion, as a protest against the odious brands of brilliantine which boys were using on their hair, sat outside the classroom for the whole period, refusing to teach us. Strange to relate, this eccentric treatment succeeded, and water generally replaced the vile-smelling fluids we had been using. Our teachers were always gowned and gave the school an aura of academic dignity in contrast to its shabby surroundings. Moreover, as every pupil was a scholarship winner, the standards were above average and the competition exceptionally keen. The great drawback was lack of adjacent playing fields, which greatly limited our sport and made *esprit de corps* hard to cultivate.

This handicap did not, however, prevent at least one of my schoolfellows from becoming an athlete of giant fame. His name was E. H. Temme, a sturdy, cheerful youth who did not shine at his lessons. One day the headmaster, "Twoggy," told Temme that if he showed as much enthusiasm for his schoolwork as he did for swimming he would go a long way. In fact, Temme went a long way with his swimming instead. He is the only man to swim the English Channel in both directions.

Temme learnt to swim at Plaistow Baths. When he left school at about sixteen he could do a mile, but none suspected

that he was a future Channel conqueror. Nor was physique specially formidable. It was between sixteen twenty-one that he developed his Dempsey dimensions shot up to 6ft. 2in. His father was a baths superintendent so here is a puzzle for future students of the effects of environment and heredity.

I left the H.E. School in 1917 at the end of my three years' course, being then fifteen years old. Brother Allan who was a civil servant at Somerset House, an ardent Christian and the mainstay of the family, suggested that I should continue schooling at his expense. He sent me to the City of London College, in Ropemaker Street, Moorgate, to enrol as a day student. Allan not only paid the fees, but also my fares to and from Liverpool Street Station and my lunches.

The change from an East End suburb to the City was drastic. I scrambled out each morning with a half-digested breakfast and joined a stream of black-coated slaves and pallid typists flowing gummy-eyed to Maryland Place Station. I squeezed into a smoky second-class carriage in which as a rule there were people standing, and then chugged through the dreary slumscape to be regurgitated at the other end. This daily ordeal in a box on wheels confirmed my purpose to become a journalist if only to escape from this rattling suffocating prison. Smutty sheep, browsing in muddy pastures between Stratford and Bow, somehow kept behind by the tide of building, were a constant reminder of distant open spaces, of hills and the sea.

The City of London College was a co-educational establishment, but unlike the H.E. in that boys and girls were taught together. This led to a certain amount of hanky-panky holding under the desks and some mild flirtations but had no more serious consequences. Discipline was not so strict as at my previous school, and I confess that, in consequence, I did not learn so much. I was studying English, economics, shorthand, history, science, French, German and mathematics.

At the start, I had some brief moments of glory. I passed well in the entrance examination and went into the top form. Then, at the first Euclid test, I was singled out by

master as the only boy who "had the slightest idea how to set out a problem." A hard-working Jewish schoolfellow came up to me and asked to see my paper. After that—and it was fair enough—he always beat me.

I was profoundly influenced by my form-master, an idealistic Jew named Aaronson, who taught me economics. He had a penetrating intellect and a whimsical sense of humour. His great shock of crinkly black hair, brushed straight back, made his nickname of "Airy" doubly apt. He was the first man I had met who did not regard my ambition to become a journalist as in the least strange or unattainable. He had innate faith in the capacity of young people to achieve what they wanted. He taught us to think objectively and logically, without blind prejudice, not only in class but also (a more difficult accomplishment) in the college debating society.

"Airy" did not apparently mind the perpetual ragging to which he was subject. His attitude to the boys and girls was that of an equal and a friend. Some of the more audacious wisecracks which students uttered in answer to his questions seemed to amuse him just as much as the rest of the class. He would adjust his rimless pince-nez glasses on the bridge of his falcon nose, launch a few shafts of ridicule and pass on. Except in outrageous cases of bad behaviour there was no corporal punishment. I fear that this tolerant code was an encouragement to slackers. In my own case I developed an incurable desire to clown to the detriment of learning, though there is no doubt that the school's methods aided the subtle process of character building. Some of the dignity and wisdom of the City reposed in this college set in its venerable heart. We thought of boys from public schools in the country in a patronising way, as of provincials.

The City of London College Day School (there were also evening classes for older students) was experimental. It was modelled in some ways on the public school—we were, for example, divided into houses—but in the main its purpose was to prepare students for commercial careers. Book-keeping and accountancy were among the subjects which I

maintained perfect discipline by force of her personality. This turned out exceptionally useful when, in later years, I was summary writer on *The Daily Telegraph*. The one subject in which I showed consistent progress was shorthand, being possibly stimulated by the knowledge that Charles Dickens was an expert shorthand writer. I was not then aware that Bernard Shaw wrote his plays in shorthand, or I should probably have been inspired to redouble my efforts. Incidentally Mr. Shaw has hit on the secret of extracting the maximum use from shorthand. Neatness is all. His copper-plate characters are easily readable by his secretary. When a colleague interviewed him recently, he poured scorn on the undecipherable scribble which passes for shorthand with the average reporter.

*Hansard* reporters in Parliament write such neat and immaculate shorthand that they can exchange books and read each other's notes. In my opinion public schools make a grievous mistake in overlooking the importance of this subject. It is of incalculable value, not only to author and journalist but also to any student who needs to take notes.

One of my colleagues in Fleet Street, Jack Sewell, who gained a brilliant double first at Cambridge, attempted to learn shorthand after coming down to newspaper level and had to confess his failure. A good shorthand writer is like a good pianist; in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he must start young.

My lunches, when at the City of London College, generally consisted of a half veal and ham pie, a roll and butter, and a cup of coffee—all of which cost about eightpence in a Lyons teashop close by. There I studied the various City types with the avid interest of a visitor at Whipsnade. I marvelled that the men's shoes were always so shiny, their hair brilliantined and parted so immaculately, their collars so clean. The black coat and striped trouser uniform was the height of sartorial splendour. Sex stirrings within me, despite my total ignorance on the subject, riveted my eyes on the young typists and I felt the subtle allure of their softly rounded figures. I developed a tremendous inferiority

schoolboy. It became my ambition to produce some order in my obstinate fair thatch, and to acquire rimless pince-nez glasses.

One day "Airy" took me aside and said, with unwonted earnestness, that he wanted my help. Somewhat surprised, I listened attentively. He said he suspected that a porter was having an undesirable influence on certain boys. Did I know anything about it? Astonished beyond words, I said that I did not. He then asked me if, as a point of honour, I would report anything wrong to him. This put me in a most awkward position in view of the "no sneaking" code. However, a few days later I saw this porter the centre of a giggling group and found that he was showing them a photograph of a nude woman. Later I heard more giggling in circumstances that puzzled me considerably. I had not the faintest idea what it was all about. Nevertheless, after much wrestling with my conscience, I decided that I ought to tell "Airy" about these strange "goings on." The porter was fired.

The City of London College was in such a closely built-up area that it was even worse off for recreational space than my previous school. It had none. But once a week we entrained for Walthamstow where we played cricket or football on a big sports ground. I only distinguished myself once, being generally fairly hopeless at sport. That occasion was when some urchins from less-favoured schools had appropriated our cricket gear and were impudently practising at the nets with it.

Emerging from our little pavilion I shouted "Hi!" which evoked a rude retort. I then made a spirited one-man charge at the intruders, who fled incontinently, dropping our bats and balls. I made the tactical mistake of pursuing the enemy too far. They picked up stones and brickbats and bombarded me from a safe distance. One stone hit me in the eye, broke my glasses and it was only luck that it did not injure the eye. Thus effectively checked, I returned lugubriously to receive, as I imagined, the congratulations of my schoolfellows and possibly a medal for gallantry from the Headmaster. It did not work out like that at all. My schoolfellows were derisive and the Head seemed most

annoyed, saying that it was the result of scuffling with hooligans and I ought to know better. I had a distinct sense of grievance.

Despite my incapacity at the game, cricket continued to fascinate me. I went regularly to the Essex county ground at Leyton to watch such stalwarts as J. W. H. T. Douglas and Percy Perrin, and I studied the records with loving zeal. Then, in collaboration with some Leyton cousins, brother Stanley and I formed a private cricket team called—after the road in which my cousins lived—the Chesterfield. Apart from constant disputation about the batting order, this team—run on severely democratic lines—went from strength to strength. Eventually we acquired one of the slightly more civilised, roped-off pitches on Wanstead Flats and even special caps—half red and half white. Though one of the master-minds behind this club, I cannot recall ever making a score of even double figures, and my bowling was a standing joke.

My study of county cricket had, moreover, given me an uncomfortable feeling that we had something wrong. It was all very well to insist that everybody should wear whites and that braces were taboo, but we had no coloured player to add tone to the side. After many conferences and much searching we found a half-caste negro boy who lived in a side street off Vicarage Lane. We asked him, with great trepidation, to play for us. To our delight he was soon persuaded, especially when offered a reduced subscription as a special inducement. I regret to add that he was easily the most hopelessly incompetent cricketer I have ever had the misfortune to see, even worse than I.

I made one or two disastrous appearances in the boxing-ring. By some extraordinary chance I was put up to box for my house—Newton House—and found myself in the ring one evening pitted against a boy of rugged physique and terrifying ferocity. Realising my hopeless situation and anxious to show off before the girls, it occurred to me that I had nothing to lose by putting up a bold front. So, from the start, I attacked this savage creature with the élan of a Spitfire pilot and the style of a threshing machine. He was so startled that I had him on the run at first. But he fought

back doggedly and my style exhausted me more rapidly than my opponent. Also I was too short-sighted without my glasses and at an early stage he dotted me on my prominent nose causing it to bleed profusely. So, in the end, covered with gore, and dizzy from his short jabbing punches, I was pronounced the loser.

Readers who have persevered so far will have perceived that we overcame difficulties of discrimination by founding our own magazine and our own cricket club. It seemed, however, that there was nothing to be done in this matter of boxing except to give it up at the earliest possible moment. The same applied to acting, as I discovered from one brief and unconvincing appearance as an aged dotard, my face covered with cotton wool, in an amateur dramatic production.

Nominally I was studying at the City of London College for the matriculation examination, but, privately, I could not see how this fitted in with my other ambitions. If I entered and failed—which seemed highly probable—it would merely put off my entry into journalism for another year. Firm parents might, with benefit to my character, have insisted that I take the examination; I don't know. As it was, when my sixteenth birthday approached, I merely went home and argued it out with Allan. He particularly wanted me to stay on another year, but I demurred and pointed out that it would merely be a year of potential journalistic experience wasted. I succeeded in staving off the matriculation exam., but the issue of whether or not I should continue at the City of London was undecided when the summer holiday of 1918 approached.

The war was in its last, most exciting phases, and manpower at its lowest ebb. Already the Germans were said to be conscripting youths of seventeen. Though I was the most indefatigable student of war among all the boys at school, I did not relish this imminent prospect of physical participation. Nevertheless my patriotism, if dimmed by the stories of horror, misery and mutilation, was not wholly quenched. I volunteered to work on the land in a scheme which had been organised by the Government for public and secondary school boys. I went off to a flax camp



near Bury St. Edmunds for a month, where we lived under canvas and semi-military discipline. The chief results of this were threefold: an acute attack of nostalgia; I started smoking in a big way, expending on cigarettes much of the five or six shillings a week we earned; and I received the first definite information on sex from another boy.

I was thoroughly unhappy in this camp, but though at liberty to go at any time, for some reason or other I felt impelled, as a point of honour, to stick it out. I had never, in wildest imaginings, dreamed that a palliasse could be so hard and the ground beneath so unsympathetic; that eight boys in a bell tent could create such a shocking muddle; that standards of honesty over eating utensils and similar articles could deteriorate so swiftly; that field cooking could spoil good food so successfully; that sanitary arrangements could be so primitive and so communal, guard duty in the small hours so exhausting and demoralising, companions so callous and indifferent, and (one or two) so foul-mouthed and lecherous.

Nor was the flax pulling amusing. The stems filled our hands with tiny splinters. We were given special gloves, but these soon wore to ribbons and offered no protection. I was appointed a gang-leader, and this merely added to my anxieties. Boys in my charge, working with slipshod rapidity and native guile, would bore tunnels into the flax and then lie down for a "mike." It was my painful, almost impossible, duty to persuade them to work more thoroughly. We grew as brown as nuts. Though our inexperienced cooks ravaged the camp with minor bellyaches, and diarrhoea, we were healthy. Yet I was acutely miserable, and despaired of human nature under canvas.

Young girls, crudely randy, hung about the outskirts of the camp. They were ignored by the true lady-killers, who, after the evening meal, would stride off boldly to the town's Monkey Parade, there to "pick up" somebody in the approved manner. I joined in once only, but was terribly abashed at this business of walking behind a promising, giggling pair till the suitable moment came for joining forces. In fact I was such a wet blanket that I was eventually told to sheer off by our principal Don Juan, who considered that

I was spoiling everything. Though extremely resentful, I realised the justice of his complaint and took myself off dolefully to a local tuck-shop.

In this same tuck-shop, where we ate indigestible pies, I used to encounter young conscripts from a neighbouring Army camp. Two, I remember in particular, were even more depressed than I. They were pale City clerks pitchforked from shabby genteel homes in the suburbs into the company of coarse ruffians who were respecters of neither property nor person. What worried them chiefly were the Zoo-like table manners and the prehistoric latrines. The bullying of the N.C.O.s and the physical strain of route marches were lesser evils. Their one ambition in life was to go to France and get a "blighty one," that is a light wound that would mean convalescence in England. Reasoning loosely from the individual to the mass, I was profoundly unimpressed with the morale of the British Army in this fourth summer of the war.

Nevertheless the marching columns down those dusty Suffolk roads did not seem nearly so glum. They were Cockneys who sometimes waved their tin hats at us and hailed us with lewd jokes.

At last this horrible camp came to an end and I humped my kitbag to the station to return, with immense relief, to civilised people and a roof that did not leak when you touched it. Yet somehow, when I was back in the basement sitting-room of Romford Road, which we called the "breakfast room," the flax camp did not seem so bad. It was my first experience of that trick of time which gradually obliterates the ugliness of past events and suffuses them, by slow process, with a rosy glow.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LEARNER REPORTER

IN A ROUND, childish hand I then began to acquaint newspapers with the rare opportunity that now offered. It was natural to start with *The Times*. Somebody—I cannot remember who—had given me the name of a Very Important Person on the staff. This V.I.P., with great kindness, wrote a long letter in reply, explaining that it was not usual for London newspapers to engage for the editorial staff youths without any previous experience of journalism. He added that the best experience was probably to be obtained in the provinces, and that there was a system of becoming an apprentice, or learner, reporter.

Slightly dismayed, but undeterred, I then used a great deal of ink and paper in writing to every other newspaper in London, ranging from *The Daily Telegraph* to the *Morning Advertiser*. Invariably the reply was a polite but firm negative with little variation in the wording. I disliked the idea of going to the provinces, and, as September wore on, it began to look as though Allan would win and I should return for another year to the City of London College. Then, as a despairing last shot, I lowered my sights and fired at a newspaper that had offices almost on my doorstep. It was the prosperous local bi-weekly which circulated over a wide area of the eastern suburbs, chiefly in the borough of West Ham, and was called the *Stratford Express*. My feelings were a blend of consternation and joy when I opened a reply signed by one Frank Whitworth, of the firm of Wilson and Whitworth, asking me to go and see him.

A first interview is a major crisis in life, like getting married or coming under fire for the first time. Dress did not present any great problem, because I had no choice. It was blue serge or nothing. But the finishing touches worried me,

Should I use brillianine to smarm down the obstinate tuft of hair at my crown or would that be considered vulgar? Should I wear my school-tie or did that look too boyish? Should I wear a white or a coloured collar? I have no recollection of how I settled these weighty problems, but remember that I arrived much too early for the interview and skulked outside the stationery shop of Messrs. Wilson and Whitworth, in Stratford Broadway, staring gloomily, with unregistering eyes, at various objects in the double windows.

Then at last, with a supreme effort, and a pounding heart, I stepped into the shop. Should I tell him about failing that oral French examination? Should I admit that my shorthand was only about sixty words a minute? The raucous shouts of the stall-holders outside and the thunder of traffic died away to a cathedral quiet. I was entering the cloisters of journalism, and the polite shop assistant who looked questioningly at the letter I produced was the acolyte. After inquiries on the telephone he led me, with that mincing walk characteristic of his brotherhood, to a small office at the back of the shop.

Mr. Whitworth was slightly bald, businesslike and husky. He was also kind and quick. He fired off a number of apparently unimportant questions about my schools, and then, after five minutes, to my joy, offered me a month's trial at 15s. a week. If I were satisfactory, he said I would be offered the chance of signing apprenticeship indentures. I left the shop elated but anxious, puzzled that he did not want any proof of my examination prowess, that he had not tested my shorthand, and wondering how on earth I could be worth fifteen precious pieces of silver a week to anybody. I loped home to Mother at a rate of knots to tell her the good news, and she, dear soul, whose confidence in her son's ability caused me many blushes, seemed moderately pleased, but not in the least surprised.

A few days later, more nervous than ever, I presented myself at Wilson and Whitworth's shop once more, ready for the battle of life. This time I was allowed to penetrate straight to the heart of the back-stage mystery. My guide took me through a door and up a spiral steel staircase, then

along a dark and narrow corridor to an untidy office of moderate size. A genial little man, with a deeply wrinkled forehead, scanty hair and glasses that slipped down his aquiline nose, looked up from a littered desk, peering at me myopically. He was introduced as Mr. Hurd, the sub-editor, who seemed so pleased to see me that I was taken aback by his spontaneous friendliness.

Subconsciously I put him in the same class as the chorus girls in pantomime who were always smiling and seemed so delighted with their jobs. My immature judgment was wrong. Though it is part of a journalist's stock to appear pleased to meet anybody or everybody, it was no effort on the part of Hurd. I did not then assess the inexhaustible supply of kindness that welled up in him. Rolling a cigarette, which was his incessant occupation when not smoking the ragged results, he introduced me in a high voice to his chief reporter, one A. H. Clifford Woods. Tall, lean, bespectacled Woods was equally friendly. I reflected with bounding spirits that this was not a bit like school and my tutors were treating me, already, as an equal.

In retrospect I acknowledge deep indebtedness to these two, who took my training in hand so patiently and perseveringly without the slightest idea of any personal reward. Both escorted me to the various engagements which are the daily round of a local reporter. They developed my latent news sense and taught me selection. Woods, in particular, went over my "copy" carefully with words of praise or criticism. Hurd, wearing out his eyes over piles of ill-written reports, sighing as he "soled and heeled" with scissors and paste and stabbed away with a blue pencil, taught me the rudiments of sub-editing.

This first day also gave me nasty surprises. My first assignment was to accompany Woods to West Ham Police Court, just across Stratford Broadway. As we approached the sinister court buildings I became dimly aware of an atmosphere of woe and depravity. Anxious, slatternly women hung about outside, with a few hard-faced, beery men wearing chokers. We pushed through a crowded ante-room where a stale smell of tobacco, blended with dirty clothes and unwashed bodies, assailed me. Woods

authoritatively tapped at the court-room door. A policeman inside pushed back a small peep-hole, and admitted us. The nauseating smell, now with one or two other indefinable elements added, met and almost overwhelmed me in a gush of hot air. The clerk was on his feet declaiming in a loud voice to the crowded court: "So-and-so, you are charged with being drunk and disorderly at Victoria Dock Road, Tidal Basin at 11.30 p.m. on September 1. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?" So-and-so, a human animal who had drunk his way to Heaven but had somehow taken the wrong turning and arrived in Hangover Hell, snarled back sullenly.

"Guilty or not guilty?" shouted the clerk. Behind him, seated high in dignity on the Bench, I could see the red-faced stipendiary magistrate. I noted his high white collar, black tail-coat, glossy black hair, red face and impassive manner. I wondered vaguely how they could state the time of the prisoner's unfortunate condition with such mathematical accuracy.

So, when other boys of my age were entering the sixth form at their public schools, I began my studies in the university of life. It was like flinging a child into a swimming bath to teach it to swim, but the method sometimes works.

Woods and I pushed into the reporters' bench, where there was not much elbow-room, and then he held a whispered conversation with a sergeant. "Not much today," he confided. "Three drunks, one betting, one affiliation and a lot of rates summonses." Later in the morning when the court had cleared, I wrote on a slip of paper, under Woods' supervision, my first contribution to the newspaper Press. It read something like this, with a catchline of "W.I.L.P.C." in one corner: "John Brown, 34, no occupation, of such and such street, Canning Town, was fined £5 for loitering for the purpose of betting."

Nothing can describe my joy when, a few days later, I saw this printed in the paper in small nonpareil type under our standing heading of "West Ham Police Court." I gleefully showed it to Violet Lansbury and I remember that, as she congratulated me, a slight smile flickered across her impassive face.

On the way back to the office Woods told me that there were some inquests in the same building that afternoon at 2.30. This delightful event was entered in the diary with a flourish and Hurd, shedding ash all over the place, put the initials "W. and G." after the entry. So with a sinking heart, wondering whether there was no end to the misery of this world, I tramped back after lunch and sat beside my mentor while tearful women gave evidence about babies that had been accidentally smothered and adults who had died of cirrhosis of the liver or double lobar pneumonia. There were seven inquests, which I thought was enough for one day. But the biggest shock was still to come.

When we returned to the office, Hurd looked up from his incessant subbing, and inquired casually: "Any good stories?" I was stunned. Good stories? How could inquests be good stories? It was a long time before I acquired the true objectivity, sometimes confused with cynicism, with which practised reporters approach a news story. In private life a reporter may be a model husband and father, tender-hearted, generous, considerate; on the job he is a combination of hunter and surgeon.

Woods said there was "nothing in them." Whereupon, little Hurd began to look at his infernal diary again and thoughtfully suggested that I should accompany him that evening to a meeting of West Ham Education Committee. Though the gaseous futility of local politics was a relief from the sordid business of the courts, I seriously wondered, as I sank into bed that night, whether, after all, I had not made a ghastly mistake in getting mixed up with this never-ending depressing grind.

After a month I was thinking differently, for I had seen myself in type, and so I signed apprenticeship indentures for a period of four years to learn the "art, trade or business of a reporter" (which is it?). I undertook to keep my masters' secrets, obey their lawful commands, not to waste nor lend their goods, not to buy or sell, or absent myself unlawfully. In return Messrs. Wilson and Whitworth undertook to raise my salary on a graduated scale to the sum of £3 a week to be earned in the fourth and final year.



Mother: Ellen Marsland



Father: James Gander





Hilda



Nigel and Julian

My memories of those four years are handcuffed inescapably to West Ham Police Court and Stratford Petty Sessions. I could never escape from these scabrous twins, who filled me with an ever-deepening disgust. Yet the urge to produce a "good story" persisted and grew, although the process might be distasteful scavenging. Every variety of crime, every nuance of perversion was revealed to me in those courts. They finally destroyed the last traces of style in my handwriting as I churned out endless reams of copy, invariably returning to the office with a notebook full of cases not yet "written up."

I learnt the art of "writing up" a case while it was still in progress; also that the magistrate could be induced to supply the Latin quotations, which he used so frequently, after the court had risen. Summonses were a nuisance because it was a question of wheedling them out of various police-officers who had served them on the defendants concerned. The charge-sheets were usually there to be seen on the clerk's desk, before the court started, but the trouble was that, with adolescent over-sleeping, I simply could not get to the courts in time. I hate to think how many times I was "filled in" by generous colleagues, in particular a bearded veteran called Waddell who ran an agency for the supply of police-court reports to London newspapers. Waddell, using a sharp-pointed glass stylus, used to write an incredible number of copies simultaneously on "flimsies," layered with carbon paper.

The courts had their lighter moments. An incorrigible one-legged Irishman named "Peggy" Dooley was constantly appearing charged with drunkenness. In the dock he was always contrite and penitent, the picture of amiability. But the police averred that when he had too much drink he became bellicose, and took off his wooden leg to chastise anyone who had the temerity to argue with him. We gleefully recorded his exchanges with the magistrates and his oft-reiterated promises of reform.

I learnt that it was unforgivable to call a defendant a prisoner, but it was permissible to call a prisoner a defendant, the distinction being that a defendant was only summoned whereas a prisoner was charged. I learnt that

in no circumstances must a reporter agree to leave a case out of the paper if it had any news value—not for kindness, gold, or love. On one occasion a defendant put a bag containing £100 in gold on the reporters' desk. He was told sharply to take it away.

Once I heard a boy being birched. He had been a hardened little guttersnipe in the dock, unmoved by his fate. He was taken away and suddenly a terrible scream penetrated two oak doors. It stabbed me in the heart and stomach. A police-officer had said that I could "have a look" if I wanted to. Scream followed scream, in awful succession. White and shaking, I opened first one door, then, more slowly, the second. His punishment was over, thank goodness, when I had summoned up the courage to peer in, but I saw the red weals across his white flesh. His wooden front had been pulped and he was in floods of tears.

Once or twice, at my elementary school, I had had the "stick" for talking. It consisted of a few sharp raps across the palm of the hand with a thick cane. I had no idea that such brutal punishments as birching and the "cat" were practised in this England. My education was progressing fine.

The most sensational police-court case I heard was the Thompson-Bywaters murder. Percy Thompson had been found in Endsleigh Gardens, Ilford, bleeding copiously from several knife wounds and, in particular, from a fearful gash at the back of the neck. Mrs. Thompson had him clasped in her arms. She was incoherent and hysterical, screaming for help. When questioned by the police she immediately aroused disbelief by pretending to be ignorant of the wounds and their cause.

Soon the investigations of Superintendent Wensley and Inspector Frank Hall had dragged out the whole sordid story of lust and crime.

Bywaters, a young ship's steward—aged only twenty—was detained, and when Mrs. Thompson accidentally caught a glimpse of him at the police station she burst out with something to the effect: "My God, why did he do it? I didn't want him to. I must tell all I know." Both then confessed and dozens of letters written by her to Bywaters

were found both at his home and in his cabin on board ship. She was seven years older and had destroyed all the letters that Bywaters had written to her.

Mrs. Thompson's letters have always slightly puzzled me. They were written in an intensely theatrical vein by a woman who had no great command of language. She referred to attempts on her husband's life which can only be described as half-hearted. There was talk about powdered glass for instance, and an electric-light bulb. I have seen several exhibitionists swallow glass without the slightest ill effect. There was, of course, a great deal more than that. She also reported to her paramour on novels dealing with like situations and newspaper cuttings of tragedies arising from illicit love.

The Earl of Birkenhead, in his *Famous Trials*, remarks on the stupidity of the final plan to murder Thompson. Why should the crime be committed in her presence? It was unworthy of the intelligence which the two prisoners undoubtedly possessed.

Lord Birkenhead said: "I still have a lingering doubt whether Edith Thompson that night was present at a crime which she had arranged or, indeed, whether she had any idea that any such crime would be attempted. But I was not present at the trial . . . and anyhow she had the will to destroy her husband for the sake of her lover."

My memories of Mrs. Thompson are extremely nebulous. She was slight and pallid, alert but intensely nervous in the dock. I cannot even remember the colour of her hair, but she had a fringe which was fashionable at the time. She would have been almost plain but for her sweeping lashes and her trim eyebrows in those days before plucking was universal. Her mouth was a trifle too large. That, I am afraid, ends my impressions, except that I remember her staring now and then in a frightened way at the crowded Press bench where there was so little elbow room that writing became more cramped and illegible than usual. She collapsed several times. I recall that she sent a wreath to her husband's funeral comprising a cushion of white chrysanthemums, orchids and roses with the inscription "From Edith."

steely eyes and eyebrows slightly shaggier than normal. In the street he would have attracted a second glance, with the thought "A fine young man." Had he been born a few years later he might have been a Commando. There was, indeed, a grim resemblance between the knife which was afterwards recovered from an Ilford drain and the weapon used by the World War II by our Commandos.

I had no relish for the Thompson-Bywaters case, and in fact, was not trusted with the reporting of it. When I went to the court it was as an observer. Privately I swore a great oath to myself that, whatever glittering prizes might be offered, I would never become a crime reporter.

My other activities ranged through a gamut of church bazaars, organ recitals, concerts, political meetings, friends' society meetings, weddings, funerals, fires and accidents. The Everest of our reporting was the West Ham Town Council meeting. I never reached this height, though I was occasionally sent to foreign, and less important, parts of Walthamstow to report council deliberations on the fringe of our circulation.

It was Hurd's delight to arrange a grand evening tour of West Ham so that I could cover three or four engagements in one evening. I could "slip on a penny tram" to go to Canning Town for a church bazaar, then I could "slip along" to darkest Silvertown for a smoking concert, call in at the Basin for a completed wedding form, and work my way back via East Ham and the Hebrides. That was how it seemed to me, though actually he was a most considerate employer and considerate in many ways.

Readers may wonder how it was possible to cover a corner by just poking your head in the door. I confess that it blunted our critical faculties, for the idea was to bring in as many names as you possibly could. The Hell was trying to vary the phrases. "Large and enthusiastic audience," "crowded and appreciative," "packed and receptive." I tried them all in turn, but there was a limit. Nevertheless I would never say that a hall was full if it were not.

My finest hour came when I discovered a Wesleyan min-

who could dictate perfect paragraphs on the day after his innumerable organ recitals and jumble sales, skilfully awarding the balm with unerring discrimination and a profound knowledge of name-spelling.

I continued my studies at West Ham College (where all the masters seemed to be Socialists) on certain evenings by special concession of Mr. Whitworth. Shorthand and that bewildering subject economics were my specialities. Presently I found myself the proud owner of a shorthand certificate for 140 words a minute, though how I passed the test is a mystery to me. It was all about the mandatory territories of Southern Persia and Mesopotamia. As every shorthand writer knows, these particular outlines are the kind that make you stop to think. Actually I did not get it all down; but I filled in the blanks from memory. I am equally puzzled to know why I persisted with the synthetic science of economics in which all roads seemed to lead to Socialism. It would have been far better, far more practical, for me to have followed up French and German. I am certain that I obtained most benefit from a correspondence course in English conducted with Cambridge University. Some painstaking tutor, laboriously adding to his earnings, marked my essays and various other exercises with marginal comments in red ink. When he bracketed a paragraph and wrote "Good" against it, my joy was unbounded, but I never confessed to my office colleagues that I was having this tuition. I felt that they would have thought it *infra dig*!

My education in those years had as many channels as the mouths of the Ganges. One night I dropped into Mansfield House Settlement, Canning Town, to see a play by the local amateurs called *The Devil's Disciple*. I intended to do my usual trick of grabbing a programme and running. But when the play started it gripped my attention and I sat engrossed to the end. It launched me on an intensive course of Shaw, and it also induced me to write to the great man himself to ask him by what method I could graduate from my local suburban paper to Fleet Street. Shaw, with his unfailing and inexhaustible kindness towards unknown letter writers seeking advice, dictated a reply to his secretary, Miss Blanche Patch. He advised that I should "stick to the suburban

weekly" till such time as, through acquaintances, I obtained a footing in Fleet Street. In a way his advice was sound, but, as will be seen, I eventually did something totally different.

Another result was to convert me for an extremely short period to vegetarianism, being also influenced towards it by brother Allan. As I was already a rabid teetotaller, I had the makings of a first-class crank. The acquisition of a pair of newly produced Harold Lloyd spectacles helped the metamorphosis and stimulated scoffers. It required more than ordinary courage to walk the streets of Stratford wearing anything unusual. Street-corners were my substitute for the school debating society. My duties permitting, I tramped from one meeting to another with a former school-friend, a pale and intellectual youth named Sidney Williams, who had a German father. The streets rang with our angry arguments. We would have liked to have the courage to interrupt the various speakers.

Once I did screw myself up to the point of trying to heckle Mr. Winston Churchill. This was an indoor meeting. I got on a chair, at question time, and began "Will Mr. Churchill . . ." Unfortunately, 99 per cent of the audience had come with the same idea. My voice was lost in the storm, which the great man rode with his customary skill and equanimity.

Sidney was a voracious reader and I had the benefit of his succinct summaries of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, while I stopped short at Shaw, Wells, and Winwood Reade. Sidney dragged me to Promenade and Symphony concerts. We were two of the most persistent supporters of the Old Vic Shakespeare productions.

Our arguments on politics, religion and the innumerable "isms" left me a Liberal-Socialist (who, when the time came, invariably voted Conservative), and an agnostic with Christian leanings. Creative evolution, as expounded by Shaw, attracted me most among philosophical theories.

I tackled the arts in a cataract of transient enthusiasms. For instance, the Queen's Hall sorties filled me with an earnest desire to study music. Some singing lessons convinced me, with difficulty, that Caruso had nothing to fear. Then I was seized with the irrational impulse to play Chopin's minute waltz, which I conceived to be the loftiest

peak of virtuosity. It intoxicated me with its exquisite rippling melody and caused me to attack my sister Elsie's new Bechstein with the fury of a Zulu warrior and the persistence of a Chinese torturer. This particular ambition lasted some years and I was within an ace of accomplishing it—to my own satisfaction—when I went abroad, thus avoiding a Petition of Rights from the neighbours.

All through these exciting adolescent years, when the beauty of life struggled through drab surroundings, my upbringing caused me to smother sex impulses, almost unbearably strong within. I had no sex experience, apart from mild flirtations in cinemas and other dark places where such behaviour seemed decent and feasible.

A local doctor's son—whose beautiful diction made me speech conscious—took my social life in hand. Apart from a tendency to practical jokes—such as putting aphrodisiacs in my tea—he was a great help. He organised a Badminton Club for the sons and daughters of local doctors and solicitors. So we formed an enclave in the jungle of Forest Gate. He also insisted that the males should all acquire evening dress. My sole acquaintance with evening dress was in the Monkey Brand advertisements. I was terribly concerned about the wild extravagance of such an idea, but my friend's dominating personality overcame all resistance. I was a Trilby to his Svengali and I eventually laid out the appalling sum of £7 10s. It was a sensational success and profoundly impressed the cream of the local bourgeoisie at Stratford Town Hall, despite a distressing tendency for the stuffed shirt to burst open in front.

At about this time, too, I greatly increased my social standing by acquiring a twin-cylinder Douglas motor-cycle. The painful fact is that I was morally compelled to buy this infernal machine. I had accumulated £25 in the Post Office Savings Bank with some ill-defined ambitions of the sort and an over-trusting friend lent me the Douglas to try. Rounding the first corner I was seized with unreasoning panic. The wheels shot from under me, and the motor-cycle lay on the ground with its wheels whizzing round helplessly, the footrest bent up into a hideous L-shape. I limped back, pushing the wretched thing, and said that I would have it.



Actually, largely owing to my incompetence with the mechanical, it was a constant source of trouble to me, an equally sustained delight to the doctor's son, who was never happy unless he had the whole thing in a hundred pieces in his garden shed. I had many idiotic adventures with this dangerous machine, on which I used to set forth dressed like Scott bound for the Pole, complete with a flying helmet. Unhappily I was often ignominiously towed back. But I made one gratifying, if startling discovery. In the animal kingdom the male has peculiar methods of attracting the opposite sex. There are the examples of the peacock, the mandrill and the garden rooster. I found that the motor-cycle had an irresistible attraction for the sweet young things of Stratford and Forest Gate. It was really a variation of cave-man stuff. I used to invite them to ride on my pillion, not even disguising the uncertainty of my control. We would then go shooting off, weaving through the traffic and the tramlines in the most hair-raising fashion. Eventually, especially if it began to rain, the inevitable would happen. I would have a diabolical skid which would throw both of us violently in the road. When I think of these incidents today, I shudder with black shame. One charming blonde had the skin scraped off tender places with the result that she limped about for weeks. Strange to say, she never spoke to me.

. . . . .

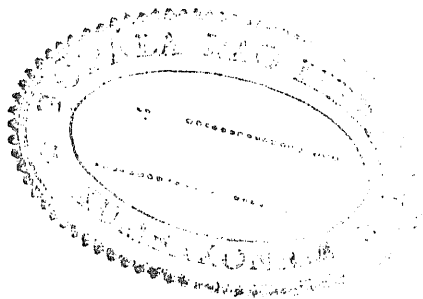
My apprenticeship came to an end, and Mr. Whitworth, though I suspect that he did not think I was as passionately devoted to duty as I should be, retained me as a full-blooded reporter at the National Union of Journalists' minimum of £4 5s. a week. This was wealth indeed, but merely a first spur to ambition. I made unceasing efforts, both by personal calls and letters, to get a footing in Fleet Street, but all to no purpose. Time dragged on till I noted with misgiving that I was approaching my twenty-second birthday and saw no end to the round of bazaars, inquests, council meetings, police-courts and organ recitals.

Then my thoughts turned in another direction. An old school friend, whom I will call Frank, had, because of his superior diction, manners and intelligence, been certified

to join the Badminton Club. Incidentally he had a delightful sense of humour (besides being something of a Romeo). He and I had many glorious gossips, lasting far into the small hours, after Club meetings, he—man of the world—pulling at his pipe, while I munched innumerable apples. Then Frank landed a job in Cairo and began to bombard me with enthusiastic, descriptive letters. It dawned on me that he had stepped into a glamorous new world of sunshine and opportunity, responsibility and authority, pleasure and independence.

I wrestled with many doubts and fears. Then, studying the newspaper one morning, I noticed an advertisement for a reporter on an Indian paper. My ignorance of India was profound and from my slight book knowledge I viewed that seething triangle with faint repugnance. Yet the advertisement haunted me and finally became a challenge. I took a pen in trembling hands and wrote my application, expecting that this signal act of courage would be instantly recognised by the advertiser. Days lengthened to weeks, and then at last, with dismay, I realised that even India, only fit (in my febrile imagination) for wild animals and gin-pickled Blimps, did not want me!

Sadly, one day, I took the bus to Fleet Street determined to make a direct assault.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### INNOCENT ABROAD

EVEN THEN I was not strictly intent on India. My uncle Walter, from Manchester, had recently died in his prime : Agra during an unlucky business trip, and his death sounded a warning. So I called at several London daily newspaper offices to be interviewed by suave and evasive gentlemen : all expert in the gentle art of "giving the brush-off."

I was mooching disconsolately down the street, wondering whether my bursting ambition would merely break my own heart, when I happened to glance up and caught the words *Times of India* on a high office window. Thought I : "wonder whether this was the paper that had the impudence to ignore me?" Mobilising courage, I raced up a narrow staircase, passed through a glass-panelled door and found myself at a counter. A young man came forward from dark inner recesses : "Yes, sir?"

I could hardly pant out the words. "Please can I see the manager? I've come about a job." Usually that was sufficient to produce a polite refusal or excuse. But the Gander Gods had intervened. This was no ordinary manager. The young man disappeared for a moment and then returned : "This way, please."

Dissolving with terror, but bolstered by sister Blanche's remarks ("After all, they can't kill you"), I entered the sanctum. He was a wisp of a man, with a small white seventeenth-century beard. His greying hair was parted in the middle, and kindly eyes twinkled through gold-rimmed pince-nez spectacles perched on a bony nose. As I stared at him, tongue-tied and transfixed, the vision of a genial leprechaun arose in my mind. Then it faded and the hair seemed to rise into a semblance of horns. I was a sheep that had strayed to the throne of Pan. Only the shepherd's crook

and the pipes were missing. But he was talking to me, this Pan-God, asking mundane questions about my qualifications and ambitions.

"What do you know about India?" he asked with a slight lisp.

"Er—nothing," I stammered.

"What are your qualifications then?"

"I'm a reporter and I'm twenty-one."

His name was W. T. Coulton, otherwise "the Skipper," known and loved by all Fleet Street to this day.

I left his office in a dream, vaguely exalted, but I confess that my mind was still hankering after a London job. Two or three days later I found myself staring disbelievingly at a typewritten letter asking me to go for an interview with one Sir Stanley Reed and also to send him specimens of my work.

Sir Stanley had recently retired from the editorship of the *Times of India* after a distinguished career. Our interview took place at his flat, grandly situated in the West End. He was tall, lean, sun-dried and quick-spoken, with the manners of a *grand seigneur*. He was also a man of quick decisions. The *Times of India* wanted a young man who would make India his life's career. After a few minutes' conversation Sir Stanley had offered me the job of chief reporter of the *Times of India* at a monthly salary of Rs. 500 (£37 10s.), plus free quarters over the office at Bori Bunder, Bombay. They were prepared, he said, to pay for a first-class passage by the British India line or a second-class by P. & O. He said he would give me time to think it over, and I needed it, for never was ignorant youth more dazzled and confused, flattered and bewildered. Sir Stanley, in his kindness, loaded me with advice—I must buy a dinner jacket, everybody wore them when dining out, and, anyway, I would need it on board; temperance was strongly advisable but not strict teetotalism, one weak whisky and soda at sunset was the ideal; I must get cards printed and "drop them" on all my seniors; I had far better wait till I reached Bombay to get my tropical kit; I must not buy one of the ridiculously shaped solar topces that they sold in London; and so on.

I went home to talk things over with the family. My mother was hotly opposed at first, with the memory of brother Walter fresh in mind. The others were fairly neutral. Somehow I knew that I had to go, and I was never really in doubt. I rushed over to West Ham Public Library and learnt all I could about Bombay, the *Times of India*, Sir Stanley. Incidentally I found that he had himself joined the paper, after local experience, in the position of reporter, twenty years earlier. Finally I overcame Mother's opposition, and it was entirely due to her insistence that when I went eventually, I had reasonable equipment. I remember, in particular, that she insisted upon buying a proper cabin trunk, rejecting with scorn my suggestion of using a monstrous iron sarcophagus disinterred from the boxroom.

Events moved with disconcerting speed. A three-month agreement arrived and was duly signed. I elected to travel first-class by British India and a passage was booked for me in the S.S. *Manela*, a comfortable ship of about 5,000 tons. Sir Stanley had advised that as the hot weather was rapidly approaching in India it was best for me to get off quickly. I believe that barely four weeks had elapsed from the time of my first interview with Coulton to the wintry February day in 1924 when, in excessively low spirits, I set off for Tilbury. My mother and a petite brunette, with whom I had become affectionately friendly, accompanied me on this dismal journey, occasionally dabbing at their eyes. At last the agony of farewell was over. I stood in a swirl of snow flakes waving my handkerchief from the tender, then I turned thoughtfully away and dabbed at *my* eyes. It was my first trip abroad; I had not even been to France. Appropriately, I had tucked away in my baggage Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*.

The *Manela* was a new little world of luxury and gave me my first lesson in how wealthy, more leisured classes live. She smelt, piquantly, of fresh paint, polish, cooking and fuel. My two-berth cabin, shared with a raw-boned Scotch engineer bound for Rawalpindi, was a revelation of comfort. When, diffidently, I rang the bell a steward came trotting along and, agreeably, called me "Sir."

Scotsman, a friendly soul, was even more inexperienced than I. He had made the mistake of not bringing a dinner jacket, an omission which put me in a most embarrassing position. I wanted to keep him company by going in to dinner in a lounge suit, yet simply could not resist the temptation of wearing my new finery. Eventually the wretched man retired to the second-class saloon for his meals, where they did not worry about such trifles.

My fellow passengers comprised twenty or thirty Sandhurst cadets taking up commissions with the Indian Army, a sprinkling of Army officers and wives returning to their stations, an assortment of thirsty business men mysteriously referred to as "box wallahs," and one or two missionaries of both sexes. The high-spirited Sandhurst element dominated the ship. I much admired their self-assurance and their cultured, authoritative voices, but was not greatly impressed by their intellect. Some bore names famous on the North-West Frontier. Among them was a forerunner, a solitary Indian whose presence foreshadowed things to come. He tended to dwell apart from his English confrères, and seemed to belong neither to East nor West. He astonished me with his beautiful command of our language and his public-school accent. Yet in some ways he was to be pitied, part of two separate worlds, belonging wholly to neither and partially disowned by both.

His light-hearted manner and sense of fun appealed to me immensely. We speedily became great friends and, strange to relate, it was he who taught me many social niceties of my own country. I remember particularly how fond he and his companions were of the new expressions "Thanks most frightfully" and "Thanks awfully." Why we never arrived at "Thanks shockingly" or "Thanks terrifically," I never understood.

At first the voyage was a dream of discovery, an enchanting travelogue unfolding in the sunshine. Salt breezes vanished the vapours and the smoke, slumdom receded like a harsh memory. The curtain rose on a fuller life. We were intensely happy and irresponsibly gay in our microcosm—idling, playing deck sports, chess or bridge, eating and laughing our heads off.

Gramophones played incessantly, always reverting automatically to "Last night on the back porch." Biscarra, with his shrewish temper, checked the general hilarity for a moment, then "dawned Gibraltar, grand and grey" and youth and silence on our spotless decks thrilled at this first sight of the bastion of Empire.

Afterwards we glided for serene days over the Mediterranean. My piano playing was brought to an end when a muscular cadet of swarthy appearance, named Grant, lifted me bodily off the stool and held me to the side of the ship in a gorilla grip until I promised to desist.

Then, spoiling the idyll like filth on a crystal mirror, came the first shock. We were nearing Port Said and a brown smear spread over the blue sea, the alluvial outcroppings of the Nile. It was symbolical. Soon I had my first contact with the East—the suffering, over-populated, diseased, hungry East. Long before I had landed my nose-dived.

Some of the Sandhurst youths had been whispering of unmentionable exhibitions, including one involving a dog and a woman, and unmentionable postcards. I was interested, curious, yet priggishly disgusted at such unmentionable depravity. Moreover I had heard alarming stories of the murderous dock-rat population in this "human pool." My mental conflict was mercifully ended by the arrival of Frank in a tender. He had made the long journey from Cairo to greet me *en passant*.

I was irritated and worried by the retinue of tout boys and beggars who instantly attached themselves to us when we landed and followed us everywhere with their importunate demands. No threats or abuse could induce them to leave us in peace. In these circumstances even the "Gullie, gullie" con man, with his disappearing chicks and alleged Scottish airs, failed to amuse. They trailed us everywhere through the dirty streets and the giant emporium where some of us wanted to buy souvenirs. Then, while Sandhurst picked up the girls and began to explore the darker mysteries or get drunk, according to fancy, Frank and I retreated to a large and shabby hotel. Here the dragoman beat off the touts at last—t

all except one small fezzed boy who evaded his vigilant eye and sold us a packet of what he called "French cards." On opening this we discovered that it contained ordinary playing cards.

It was good to see Frank. We yarned for hours. But I felt I could not be happy again until I was back in the safe, clean, well-ordered *Manela*. At last—to my immense relief—I was in my little cabin again telling that sane but dull Scotsman about the awful things that had happened ashore. Awful? Well, come to think of it, nothing much had happened at all, though it seemed awful. He, with native caution, had not left the ship, thus saving his bawbees and his honour. In the midst of my recital there was a sudden fusillade of revolver shots. One of the Sandhurst types, returning highly elated, had made his protest at the excessive charges of the boatman. The demonstration, which was noisy but harmless, proved most effective.

The Suez Canal was exactly as I had supposed—a straight narrow ditch through the desert debouching occasionally into lakes. Sheikhs, camels, palm-trees, were so like the little models at Sunday school that my faith in humanity and the goodness of the world were restored. Then we passed into the hot, humid Red Sea. We lounged listlessly about the deck till the summons to meals, when we sat in the saloons under whirling white punkahs and the Goanese stewards whipped away the plates before we had finished. One morning the Indian officer persuaded me—on the strict understanding that it was a teetotal drink—to have a John Collins. Usually the Westerner is accused of introducing coloured races to alcohol. Mine was a rare example of the reverse process. I liked the drink and immediately afterwards had a prolonged fit of the giggles, which, off and on, has lasted ever since.

We called at Aden, where I inspected those hideous marine parodies the merman and the merwoman, dried nightmare creatures. Then, like a "sea-shouldering whale," we wallowed across the Indian Ocean on the last lap. I remember little of it except my first glimpses of the flying-fishes, and a growing feeling of apprehension that, any time now, I would have to start work on a terrifying new job in an



unknown country. The nearer I approached India the I liked it.

About three weeks after leaving London we neared Bombay and the "breaking up" spirit was abroad. Somebody put a booby trap of white flour over my door, and I had usual apple-pie bed. Hilarious celebrations went on at the bar. I stood on the deck with a colonel's wife, whose slight Mongolian features fascinated me. We were fanned by a fetid breeze that carried a subtle smell of spices blended with ordure, dirt and decay. All the perfumes of Arabia and the stinks of Bow. We gazed at the glowing phosphorescent city and fresh wafts, mingling a dozen sharp unfamiliar scents with dust and garbage, assailed me. "What is that smell?" I asked. She looked at me, amused, and gave a short laugh. "Oh, that? That's the smell of the East."

That night when I lay sweating in my bunk, sleepless and uncomfortable, I thought I had made a bad mistake. It was airless, suffocating—like being buried alive. The open porthole and the whirring fan made no difference. I could not live in such a climate. *Bunder* boats slid past the porthole with dark triangular sails, like bat-figments of a bad dream. I was acutely miserable.

At dawn I wearily faced that prolonged, uneasy flap that always precedes disembarkation. All the jovial camaraderie of the voyage vanished abruptly, to be replaced by an inexplicable nervous tension, with every man for himself. My first impressions were blurred then by the morning rain and a growing anxiety; now, by the passage of time. Bombay Island is uncannily like a lobster's claw, with Malabar Hill as the short nipper and Colaba as the long. The two peninsulas enclosing Back Bay. Though the resemblance was not apparent from the eastern side where we lay off the docks in the miles-wide channel, the encyclopaedia had imprinted this fact on my fancy. The claw was closing on me.

We moved in ponderously to Ballard Pier while I stared unhappily at the odorous dowry of Catherine of Braganza at this Bombay. There was a super marble arch which somebody said was the "Gateway of India" on Apollo Bunder.



Interviewing Muntaz Begum, Bombay, 1925



a Saracenic-Gothic-Italian medley which blended the architecture of East and West in fantastic, rococo style. Elephanta Island lay humped and mysterious, hiding the ancient secrets of its cave temples.

Slowly we manœuvred alongside. Then scores of skinny chattering coolies began to handle the gangways, six men doing the work of one. Our baggage rolled off into the yawning Customs sheds, followed by the fussing passengers. I had been told that somebody would meet me and waited dolefully. Soon I was the last passenger left on board and there was no sign of the reception committee. So I stepped ashore alone, to be immediately accosted by a tall copper-coloured man wearing peg-top white trousers, a shirt outside them and an impressive *pugaree* that flowed down his back. He raised his handle-bar moustache slightly in an amiable grin which revealed red-stained teeth. Then he salaamed respectfully and presented a pile of chits. In my harassed frame of my mind I had little patience to read them, but I saw his kingly name, say, Mahomed Unayet Khan, to whose trustworthiness and willingness many witnesses were testifying. It dawned on me that this splendid creature, who might have stepped off the stage of the Borough Theatre, Stratford, during a performance of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, was offering to be my slave—"bearer" they called it.

I was scared to death. "No, no," I said hurriedly. He salaamed again gravely and went off to worry some other sahib. I noticed that dozens of similar men were sculling about the quay with packets of dog-eared chits. It was a foretaste of India's gigantic unemployment problem.

My baggage was soon through the Customs, where I had the malicious satisfaction of seeing some of the Sandhurst youths, who had disembarked hours ago, prising the tops off boxes to unearth firearms. Then, outside on a pavement spattered with what I took to be blood—it was in fact betelnut expectoration—I stood like a lost lamb beside my pile of luggage.

A row of decrepit victorias was drawn up against the kerb, with bony horses apparently only kept on their feet by the shafts. Pot-bellied naked children whined round for bak-sheesh; horribly deformed beggars came writhing and

shuffling towards me. I heard one or two other Europeans, in a similar predicament, using a magic word: "*Jow*" ("Go"). I was consumed with pity, but I had no Indian money and I had to make some defensive gesture. So I, too, said "*Jow*," in a timid voice. It had no effect. But now the red-fezzed victoria drivers, whom I soon learned to call gharry-wallahs, had perceived a potential victim and all raised their whips in unison with loud shrieks of "Sahib, sahib; gharry, sahib."

I advanced on the nearest, who happened to be the one with the most disarming grin on his pock-marked face. "*Times of India?*" I inquired. He looked sad and intensely puzzled. I repeated it over and over again, using every kind of intonation. He held an excited conference with his colleagues, and also enlisted the queerest-looking policeman I had ever seen, a man wearing a cylindrical yellow hat and blue bloomers. At last, when I was in despair, a great light came over his brown, pitted face. "Ah, Timesofindya," he said in a curious sing-song, with the satisfied air of one correcting a child.

I entered his gharry with grave misgivings, which increased as my trunks were loaded. The skeleton horse sprang unexpectedly to life and even broke into a trot. We weaved through traffic which ranged from high-powered cars and trams to goats and cows that crossed the roads, with astonishing immunity, at funeral pace.

Thus, wearing my best blue serge suit and a trilby hat, feeling excessively sweaty and unimportant, I arrived at the *Times of India* office, a long building with a sham minaret *motif* opposite the sprawling baroque palace which they called preposterously the Victoria terminus of the Great Indian Peninsular railway. My passage from Stratford Broadway to Bori Bunder was complete.

. . . . .

We lived in a barn of a place over the office called a "chummery." It had a bare stone floor and a lofty roof lost in gloom and rafters. Our "bedrooms" consisted of three cubicles opening off this communal mess. Long windows led out to a roof terrace. The chummery had the absolute minimum of furniture because nobody regarded it as an even

semi-permanent home and therefore did not want to buy anything. It was also liable to be invaded by other European members of the staff for meals and drinks. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the chummery appointments was the cutlery. All the knives had been worn down to short daggers by too much sharpening in the kitchen.

Three of us lived in the chummery, the other two being Francis Low (now Sir Francis), who was then editor of the *Evening News of India*, and a man, now dead, whom I will call Jay. Both were Scotsmen but otherwise were poles asunder in temperament, character, and almost every other way. Jay was the chief sub-editor. He suffered from a fine intellect and boozier's gloom. It was he who had been supposed to meet me, but, having his habitual hang-over, was too late, and, characteristically, was overwhelmed with remorse when he came scurrying back to the chummery after me in a taxi. His appearance was striking. Lank black hair was brushed back from a high, bulging brow. He wore thick pebble glasses, and freckles emphasised the sallowness of his face. Ill-fitting false teeth, a Charlie Chaplin moustache and a rich Glasgow accent completed the picture.

His daily consumption of alcohol, from the moment when he took his breakfast of brandy and soda till he poured himself into bed at night, was incredible. Yet he was one of the finest sub-editors I have ever met and also the soul of generosity. He flung his money about in the most recklessly improvident way and invariably spent his salary well in advance. He was always complaining about having "too much wur-r-r-k," or, alternatively, of feeling ill. Jay had an astonishing faculty for writing blank verse, and in this Shakespearean medium had completed a play with a scriptural theme. But nobody would publish it. Eventually a firm took it and £50 from Jay, promising to publish, and then promptly went out of business.

Low came from Aberdeen, where he had been a sub-editor on the *Free Press*. His strength of body and character made him a true son of the granite city. In World War I he had been an army captain in "Mesopotamia." He belied the Scotsman's reputation with his unfailing, glorious sense of humour, and, born to command, he was also blessed with inexhaustible

energy. My debt to him is immense, for he immediately took the education of the young greenhorn in hand, with tact, persistence and a proper apportionment of praise or disapproval.

I made the alarming discovery that I had six reporters to control—three Hindus, two Parsis, and a Mussulman (Muslim). Low took me down to the office to introduce me to this miniature League of Nations. The office comprised a huge hall divided into cubicles and over each cubicle a near-white punkah rotated, the speed controlled by the whim of the person who worked in its vortex. In my particular cubicle the reporters, suitably awed by the occasion, shook hands limply, one by one, with a lean bewildered youth who had been miraculously plucked from among the white millions in a distant island to be their Man of Destiny. I was a *chota sahib* (little sahib) as distinct from a *burra sahib* (big sahib) like the editor.

English was their *lingua franca*, and when I heard their excellent command of my native language I felt ashamed of my own French and German. The most senior was Framrose, a Parsi, who wore the national acorn hat on his bald dome and gold spectacles on his owl's nose. His yellow face exuded good humour, confirmed by his nervous tittering laugh. Sirur, graver in manner and darker in complexion, was the senior Hindu, of whose conscientious zeal I soon had convincing proof. Another Hindu, regarded as our most promising recruit, was young Swami—handsome, keen, intelligent. Khadiri, the Mussulman, unfairly regarded as something of a comedian because his English was the weakest, was an amiable fat grin under a red fez.

Never did an experienced team have a more callow leader, but I represented the British raj. Twenty years ago that, with youth, humour and a certain amount of courage, was sufficient. I learnt at once that British influence was the one unifying factor in a sub-continent with more discords and differences of race, religion and politics than were contained in the whole continent of Europe.

I learnt also of the steady infiltration of Western ideas, a process that was to produce a revolution. My reporters all wore European dress. The Hindus were Brahmins, but

observed few of the orthodox caste practices. Framrose<sup>1</sup> studied astrology but said that he was merely taking it out of books and did not necessarily agree with it. Most of them were graduates of English-run universities and had had an education far superior to my own. If I had not realised it before, it came upon me with an overwhelming rush, in that oppressive office, how lucky I was to be born English.

<sup>1</sup> He prepared my horoscope. Almost everything in it was wrong except the prediction that I would travel a long way.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CHOTA SAHIB

MONTHS of painful adjustment and acclimatisation followed. My daily regimen was something like this. At dawn a Hindu bearer, a patient old man whose name I forget, would bring in *chota hasri* (little breakfast) consisting of a cup of tea, biscuits and an orange. He would then hold up a pair of tennis shorts for me to step into—why a sahib is supposed to be unable to put on his own pants is one of the unsolved mysteries of the East.

I then accompanied Low over to the Bombay Gymkhana, a hard tennis courts where we played two or three strenuous sets. My chief recollection of this is that it produced the real thirst I had ever known. My shirt and shorts could have been wrung out afterwards. I was dehydrated, and the lime squash after tennis was Heaven.

I should explain that I was exceptionally privileged to be a member of the Bombay Gymkhana Club, for the Europeans of Bombay had a caste system of their own which was rigidly enforced. Only *pukka sahibs* could belong to the premier sporting club, the Gymkhana. I came into this category because I was a member of the editorial staff of the *Times of India*, but I had some qualms when it came to filling up the name of my school. However, the City of London College looked impressive enough and so I was admitted.

The mechanical staff of the *Times of India* were not eligible for membership of the Gymkhana, nor were some of my fellow passengers who had come out to jobs in the Bombay stores or other non-professional appointments. They had to join a club called the Commercial Gymkhana. They could invite us to their club but we could not invite them to ours! Membership of the Gymkhana meant

one was definitely admitted to the ranks of the *pukka sahibs*, and that one could eventually graduate to still more exalted clubs, like the Byculla, the Bombay, or even the holy of holies, the Yacht Club. Indians, or Anglo-Indians (Eurasians) showing any traces of colour, could not belong to any of these clubs. They were "untouchables." The only place to which all were admitted regardless of race or colour, purse or creed, was the Y.M.C.A. The Hindus, Parsis and Moslems had their own Gymkhanas.

This amazing system of graduated class distinction was upheld by sahibs with red and purple complexions, who, in their private conversations, extolled the supremacy of the white race and criticised the wicked caste taboos of the Hindus.

After tennis and the thirst-quenching lime squashes, I used to hare back, exhausted, to the chummery, which was only about a quarter of a mile away across the *maidan*, the Bombay equivalent of Wanstead Flats. The form then was to bawl a phrase that sounded like "Boy, ghoosal tyer kurro," in that wonderful chummery-cum-Army language that passed for Hindustani. This produced a warm bath, after which I would be helped by my aged bearer into various garments which he had laid out ready.

A combined operation by our three bearers and the Goanese cook then delivered the breakfast. Incidentally all our food was the nearest approximation to European diet that we could get, though Bombay duck (a local fish) and curry recurred with distressing frequency.

If during breakfast we noticed, for example, that our chummery terrier had left a rat's corpse lying about we would go through an elaborate pantomime to have it removed. I would tell my bearer, who would then tell the *hamal* (a gentleman whose duties I find extremely hard to define). The *hamal* would then disappear for some minutes trying to find the *mater* (sweeper), who had invariably gone to earth. Eventually the *mater* would reluctantly appear and, amid encouraging cries from the assembled bearers, the cook and the *hamal* remove the offending body.

After breakfast my bearer might deem the time opportune to present his expenses account, which always recorded the

consumption of enough boot, metal polish, and soap to keep a battalion of the Guards in trim for duty at Buckingham Palace. Each item was marked down in annas, pice and pies, showing the cost to a twelfth of a penny. He was a natural genius at accounts. I used to raise a feeble protest at first, but his pained, reproachful air was too much for me.

My next move was to go, bone-weary, to the office to mark diary events with the initials of the most suitable reporters; also to study the opposition journal, the *Bombay Chronicle*, to see what we had missed. The nationalist *Bombay Chronicle* was apt to be rude about the *Times of India*, which it called "the old woman of Bori Bunder, with its tin-can appendage the *Evening News*." The *Chronicle* had been edited by an Englishman called Horniman who was a Congress sympathiser, but at this particular time he had been deported by the Bombay Government. He returned during my chief reportership and my facetious description of the enthusiastic scenes earned golden opinions in the *Times* office and fresh torrents of abuse from the *Chronicle*, which described it as "another fit of abnormal stupidity and malice." To me this *Eatanswill Gazette* business was a joke, but to them a deadly serious matter.

In fact our whole attitude towards Indian politics was one of irritation and intense boredom. The educated Indians were obsessed with politics to the exclusion of all other interests. Gandhi's influence was growing steadily and the white *khaddar* uniforms were already to be seen everywhere. His non-co-operation and non-violence movements gained in strength from day to day. We sensed that we were living on a volcano and sometimes mere annoyance gave place to anger. European opinion had been almost solidly behind General Dyer at the time of the Amritsar "massacre," and when high-minded Sir Stanley Reed championed the Indian point of view he incurred open hostility. It was muttered in the office that *Times of India* men were being black-balled from the Yacht Club because of this.

One member of the staff, known as Old Bill, used to brood over this grievance when he visited us in the chummary to drink with Jay. He endlessly recited his own version of the Amritsar affair. "There they were, old bean, millions

of them, old bean, bololing like stink.” Finally, as the narrative sunk into complete incoherence, we would agree that Amritsar was even more boring than non-co-operation.

My treatment of the Horniman return and my personal attitude to Gandhi seem, in retrospect, to be symptomatic of the wider feeling among the Europeans. We would have liked to dismiss Indian politics as a joke, but our derision did not extend to the Mahatma. It was not merely that he expressed feelings of personal friendliness for the English, not merely that we knew he had no malice, no cruelty, or unkindness in him. We were already conscious of his greatness, demonstrated in his power over men, and we realised that his sun was rising in splendour to shed lasting effulgence on the Indian scene.

He was, of course, keen on publicity and realised that his saintly pose had its due effect. I first saw him at a crowded meeting in the Cowasji Jehangir Hall, Bombay. He made sure that I was supplied with a copy of his speech in English. As he pushed through the crowd afterwards, with hundreds pressing round to touch him, I thought how utterly insignificant he looked—frail, crumpled, toothless, bald and skinny, bespectacled. He passed within a foot, beaming and salaaming, and I was conscious of the aura of his vibrant personality. I wanted to stop him and talk. Then I remembered the axiom of good reporters. Do not pester celebrities for no good reason.

To return, from this slight digression, to the account of my daily regimen. After my earnest study of the *Bombay Chronicle* I would then tease my brains for (a) satisfactory explanations of the things we had missed, and (b) some stunt that would appease the *Evening News*.

The first requirement was easier than the second and could often be met by the old formula “What’s new isn’t true and what’s true isn’t new.” The second called for ingenuity and creative thought of a higher order. I would pursue such stories as a report of sharks in Back Bay, the arrival of celebrities in the mail boat, the installation of a new automatic telephone system, a big accident, or a house collapse. These house collapses were, for some reason or other, probably climatic—fairly frequent occurrences. I

remember that once an Indian sub-editor, with singular lack of taste, gleefully recorded in a headline: "Sons of toil buried under tons of soil."

Sometimes a sepoy would come in and say "Sheppard sahib salaam do." That meant that Samuel Sheppard, the editor, wanted to see me, sometimes for the purpose of administering a mild rebuke. Sheppard was a dapper product of public school and university, with gentlemanly instincts and fine manners. His immaculately parted grey hair and quiet, cultured voice were the keys to his character. I think I offended him by not "dropping a card" on him in the conventional manner, but I had developed a streak of obstinacy over this card-dropping business. Nevertheless, he was a man of outstanding generosity and when I left the *Times of India* gave me the finest testimonial I have ever had or am ever likely to have.

Once Sheppard suggested that I should spend the night in a haunted house somewhere in the suburbs with a view to writing a screamingly funny story about it. In the sun-baked office when he unfolded the idea it made me fairly quake with laughter, but when shades of night enveloped that eerie Eastern city it did not seem nearly so comic. I enlisted the aid of Sirur, in whose company I thought I should be able to cope better with Hindu spooks. He agreed, but, I thought, did not seem particularly keen.

We went off in a taxi, he metaphorically holding my hand, but we had singular difficulty in finding the house that Sheppard had described. At last I began to get slightly irritated, relishing this performance less and less. I insisted that we must find a haunted house of some kind. At last Sirur said he had found the place, a large stucco building, empty and falling into decay. We reconnoitred the dirty, echoing rooms cautiously, distastefully. Then Sirur closely questioned the night watchman, finally translating to me: "He says that some people say this house was haunted but others say that there were cases of plague here." Sirur was a good psychologist. I said: "You know, I don't believe this is the house that Sheppard meant. Let's go." We retired, in some disorder, and I had a hot bath. The haunted house story was never written.

To resume my tale of the daily round. I produced my *Evening News* story by about noon and then trooped up to the chummary for tiffin. It was a rule, violated only by a foolhardy few, not to drink until sunset. Nevertheless the midday meal was soporific and usually followed by a siesta in a long chair. Then came the heavy chore of sub-editing the reporters' copy, eliminating the "babuisms," and putting on suitable headlines. Worse was inspecting our most serious competitor, the *Indian Daily Mail*, for "misses."

The comparative cool of early evening, before the swoop of Asiatic night, was the time for a fresh, even more frantic outburst of athleticism. We played tennis or rowed on Back Bay, where the water was usually so calm that it was possible to use the lightest of river craft. That is, it was possible for a competent oarsman. It was my misfortune to imagine that I could do anything. So one day I boldly launched out in a skiff with a sliding seat, bound for Government House sands, a privilege permitted to Gymkhana wallahs when the Governor was not in residence. All went well for about twenty sweeping strokes till I heard a cry of alarm behind me. Turning my head, I found myself heading at a rate of knots for an anchored *bunder* boat. I hastily shipped one oar and over she went. With the assistance of the boatman and a great deal of swimming, I retrieved the oars and pushed the upturned boat back to the boat-house. Then I returned, dripping and crestfallen, to the chummary.

After the evening exercise we invariably had another bath or shower and began the serious business of drinking on the Gymkhana lawn. I should explain that for some months I was a rigid teetotaller, for, apart from the many warnings I had had in London of the evil consequences of drink in the East, the evidence around me was only too painfully clear. However, the virtues of the *chota peg* (whisky and soda) as a social lubricant were equally apparent and the magic of evening was so compelling that I eventually succumbed, beginning with a *poww peg* (quarter peg). Our drinks were very weak, with lots of soda in them, but there were apt to be many of them. The musical clink of glasses, the moon sailing over the palms, and the bare-footed waiters gliding about the smooth lawn made life gay and happy. We forgot

the sordid poverty, disease and overcrowding, the poverty and the misery, the caste prejudice, the racial clashes and the greed.

After all, it was nothing to do with us, the gilded youth of the Empire. We, who were kind to our bearers and our coolie staff, and to whom the millions of this backward land bowed down. We were deplorably frivolous, but commendably spirited. As the evening progressed the groups round the Gymkhana tables grew bigger and more hilarious. Drums and music, wafted on warm air, stole our senses with the alcohol.

Dinner was a movable feast and we were apt to go trooping off noisily to some other chummery with a mob of chums, acquaintances, suddenly promoted to bosom friends, who were invited to take "pot luck." The Goanese cook always managed this miracle of loaves and fishes. He had to, or he would have been fired.

After dinner someone would occasionally suggest a "down the road." This always perturbed me acutely. The "road" meant Grant Road, the notorious brothel quarter. Bombay was said, at that time, to have the biggest population of prostitutes of any town in the British Empire. They were displayed in so-called "cages" in the Grant Road area. The cages were something like shop windows, instead of glass they had wooden bars reminiscent of the elephant house at the Zoo. A taxi tour of the "cages" was one of the regular sights of Bombay. Bedizened and diseased wretches, of all shades of colour, waved and shrieked at the passing sahibs. I never felt anything but pity and revulsion, nor, I believe, did the vast majority of the sahibs.

There were also superior houses in the same area where one could enter a large reception hall, buy drinks of doubtful quality at an exorbitant price, and dance with the Eurasian girls. The idea was to go, when the spirit moved, into the inner room. However, the sahibs, under compulsion of nothing better to do, had, in nine cases out of ten, contented only with a sense of curiosity and tolerant, if misguided, amusement. This infuriated the memsahib proprietors—"Mrs. Warrens"—who had an eye to business. Uproar and unprofitable visitors were speedily turned out.

Ashamed of what Bernard Shaw would call my "Lisson Grove prudery," equally ashamed to associate with whores, I accompanied my *chota sahib* friends on these expeditions as seldom as possible. I detested the whole performance, being incapable of understanding anybody paying for love or being paid for it. The curious thing was that, in the more expensive "houses," one never saw any indecorous behaviour in the reception rooms. All was as formal and polite as at a Government House ball. Chummery gossip related how a former leader-writer of the *Times of India* had produced his best leaders in "Number so-and-so," a procession of sepoy's carrying the copy to the office.

In Indian-run houses the style was cruder and it was not uncommon to see naked girls. But, strange to say, they were often bashful and diffident in the presence of the sahibs. Perhaps they had been driven to this life by sheer poverty.

The young sahibs, on their part, were tempted to these resorts by the chronic shortage of European women in India. This meant that the few white women were thoroughly spoiled. They could pick and choose among the numerous sahibs competing for their favours. Nature always intended that there should be a surplus of women. When the reverse occurs the consequences are deplorable.

Lack of any sort of cultural life, and the comfortless conditions in the chummeries also tended to encourage Grant Road visits. There was no home life worth mentioning and no radio, few films and theatres. Performances of *The Gondoliers* by the Bombay Amateur Dramatic Society only partially succeeded as a counter-attraction. However, despite the peculiar conditions which caused the Grant Road area to flourish like a monstrous tropical growth, the Government did succeed in abolishing the brothels in the 1930's.

In my time, a serious-minded minority made a valiant attempt to combat the general atmosphere of "*kuch per wani*" (It doesn't matter). They made super-human efforts to study Urdu and Hindi, or India's manifold problems. Most of the *chota sahibs*, succumbing to the tempo of a land where they use the same word for "yesterday" and "tomorrow," did the best job they could in office



hours, and then forgot Mother India until the following morning at ten o'clock. Evidence all around us of past British achievement in buildings, railways, the civil and military administration, the hospitals, the judiciary, and the foundations of democracy seemed swallowed up in the vast tide of dumb misery. It was a natural defence to pull down the shutters of the mind. An American once remarked to me after reading Mr. Winston Churchill's *My Early Life* that during his military service in India he did not seem to be aware of the existence of the Indians at all. I should say that, for myself, I was fully aware of it but trying, half the time, to forget it.

The only important change in my regimen during my two years' chief reportership was when, under the persuasion of an office colleague, I joined the Bombay Light Horse, a voluntary spare-time regiment (exclusively for Europeans) attached to the Indian Defence Force.

This colleague was an assistant editor of gangling demeanour whose conspicuous good-nature, cultured mind and bubbling humour made a lasting impression on me. His name was "Algy" Lee, and he was a Cambridge man, tall and toothy, who had been a tutor at Aligarh Muslim University. "Algy" lent me his pony to take my first riding lessons. Why I was not killed I cannot imagine, for the beast continually ran away with me, utterly beyond my control. On one occasion, bound for the stable, it dashed over a level crossing in front of a train in a manner that would have done credit to a Hollywood producer. I had no idea how to ride.

A Canadian ex-rancher, called Flanders, generally regarded as the best rider in Bombay, then took me in hand, and suggested that we should enter jointly for the pair-horse jumping in the Bombay Mud Sports. Personally I thought this was a trifle ambitious, but he was excessively confident, believing that my borrowed steed would be influenced by his and we should win easily. The Bombay Mud Sports, open only to European amateur riders, were held on the *maidan* during the monsoon. Flanders and I cantered up gamely to the first jump in the presence of a large and supercilious crowd of both sexes.

which showed an earnest desire to sit down. Two hefty clumps in the ribs caused him to change his mind but put him in a thoroughly bad temper. He jumped sideways, causing me to cannon violently into Flanders and knock the hurdle over. It was like "Ring o' Roses" and we all fell down. In some mysterious way, which puzzles me to this day, I found myself back in the saddle heading in a one-man Balaclava for the second obstacle.

As we neared the moment of take-off my pony applied four-wheel brakes and slithered along on his quarters. This time I held on grimly, but the pony was not beaten. He jerked to his feet, evasively swerved round the jump, and then, gripping the bit unshakably, set off for distant Colaba at a spluttering gallop. The Gymkhana spectators said a sad farewell to one competitor. They were agreeably surprised when I turned up again half-an-hour later and entered for the scurry event.

The main advantages of Bombay Light Horse membership were a Government grant to buy and partially maintain a horse. It also provided an alternative form of morning exercise. A disadvantage was the extremely hard slog of drilling on the sands. I had a Waler, with one eye, who obstinately pulled in one direction and the physical strain was considerable. Once a year we went to an annual camp at Santa Cruz, a Bombay suburb near the palm-fringed beach of Juhu. We were issued with swords and rifles, with quantities of blank ammunition, and at dawn were sweaty pawns in make-believe war. Trooper Gander rode miles and miles over a jungle chess-board, pushed on foot through head-high grass, blazed away at shadows among the banyan trees—and then took the train back to Bombay to start on a day's work.

Sometimes, as an alternative to unrealistic war, we hunted jackal with the Bombay Hunt and a full pack of English foxhounds. Then my pony, so reluctant at drill, really enjoyed himself and went off hell for leather, ready to take any obstacle in the treacherous jungle in his stride. Riderless horses would come careering past. It was madly exciting and not a little frightening. There may have been

some slight danger to the jackals but there was far more to the sahibs. On the hunts in which I took part there was never any kill, but many a spill.

We were simply crazy on exercise, always working on the theory that we could sweat out in the morning alcohol imbibed the night before. This was all the more remarkable because we were at such pains to pretend that we were fastidious drinkers and connoisseurs of different brands. Because I thought it was doggish I used to ask for Cockburn Campbell whisky, though frankly it all tasted the same to me, especially when diluted so liberally with soda. Having gone to all this trouble, we were, as I say, then obsessed with a frantic desire to get rid of it all.

I was a poor athlete, and, therefore, though I added badminton and swimming to my riding and tennis, I ranked low in the social hierarchy of Bombay. In a desperate attempt to raise my status slightly I once persuaded Jay to teach me golf on the *maidan*. He had his habitual hang-over when I dragged him out at dawn, and he was muttering strange oaths in his Scottish accent. He tottered visibly on the first tee and beads of spirituous sweat stood on his pallid brow. I gaped at him yokel-wise. "You want to add-r-r-r-ess the ball like this," he said, wagging the driver. Then he lashed out violently and hit me on the topee with the head of the club on the back-swing. Here ended my first lesson, in apologies and disorder. It cured me, for the time, of social ambition. But the real swells of Bombay were the members of the Gymkhana cricket eleven or the Rugger XV. There is not much doubt that most of us over-exercised, but Rugger, played in the monsoon, was the greatest strain of all in that climate. While the Indians were great cricket and soccer fans, Rugger seemed to strike them mainly as irresistibly funny. They gathered on the touch-line roaring with laughter at the spectacle of the sahibs downing each other in the mud.

Looking back now, it seems to me that the sun soaked into our systems, governed our lives and remoulded our characters. It gave us fierce energy in spasms and took away the gravity of life. Nothing seemed to matter in that prodigal sunshine. We effervesced perpetually with high-

spirits and laughter, except when a sudden mood, like the monsoon covering the sky with black clouds, would plunge us abruptly into profound depressions or fits of temper according to personality.

Every form of life was prolific, including the bacteria. The sun gave life and took it away; inspired activity and sapped vitality. It is no accident that the "starvation" belt roughly follows the tropics round the world. The half-sized eggs that we had for breakfast were symbolical.

Some seemed less overcome than others by the spiritual and physical climate. Such a one was Eric Linklater, who came out to join us as assistant editor in 1925. I was detailed to meet him at Ballard Pier and went on board the P. & O. liner with the faintly patronising air of a sixth-form boy (with one year's experience of India) taking charge of a *novi*. I hunted about the decks and eventually found a pile of baggage marked "E. R. R. Linklater." Soon the owner arrived, a strongly built man of medium height, prematurely bald, with a finely domed forehead and rimless pince-nez glasses. He was serious and preoccupied—as everyone is at such a moment—and he was not in the least disposed to be patronised. I was growing used to Scottish accents by this time, but I would not have instantly placed him as an Orcadian.

Link came to live in the chummery, Low having moved out to more exalted quarters. I always thought of him as a moderate, quiet and studious man, toughened and tempered by his war experiences. He wrote competent leading articles, but never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that he would write a best-seller like *Juan in America* and become in my lifetime one of the most amusing, inventive and original of contemporary writers, whose command of language is prodigious. Nor did I associate his habit of scribbling in notebooks with *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, or it might have given me a clue.

The young men about town who took an earnest interest in the lighter side of life were known as "functioneeros." Link was never a functioneero; in fact, he did not play tennis, cricket or football and I cannot remember ever seeing him at a social function. He was not so mad on exercise as

the rest of us, but, as far as I remember, went in for scull and golf.

He was markedly self-confident, and, if dour, exceptionally good-natured. I remember he astonished and shocked me on one occasion when I was having an argument with *Times of India* about salary by advising me to resign if I did not get what I asked.

"But I haven't any job to go to," I protested.

"Well, if you can't get a better job than this I shall be very surprised," retorted Link.

He was never ill, whereas I, who in my teens had enjoyed greatly improved health, now began to fall a prey to all the common ailments of Bombay, starting with malaria and working up to dysentery.

. . . . .

So far I have talked mainly about our amusements, and have thus put the gharry before the horse. To correct this I will come now to some of the jobs, including one "wool-shaker" story.

Soon after my arrival in Bombay, editor Sheppard, who was also the Bombay representative of the London *Times*, commissioned me to go up-country to cover a story both for *The Times* and the *Times of India*. It was strange that, having lived all my life almost on the doorstep of the London *Times*, I had to travel five thousand miles to a tropical country to live and work among alien people before I had the faintest possibility of getting anything in the august journal. I was tremendously excited and a little fearful.

I was instructed to travel to a small military cantonment called Nasirabad, near Ajmere, to meet one Squadron Leader MacLaren, who, with Flying Officer Plenderleith and Flight Sergeant Andrews, was attempting to fly round the world in a Vickers-Vulture amphibian. Round-the-world flights were chancy affairs in those days. These modern successes of Sir Francis Drake had been continuously dogged by bad luck and had made many forced landings. However, I

along with head loads of baggage, including bedding for the train and enough kit for an Everest expedition.

The rapture of youth made every move an eager adventure. I vividly remember the train journey to Ajmere, my first experience of living in a Dak bungalow at Nasirabad (a sort of Government-maintained hostel for travelling sahibs), the Officers' Club, the Colonel, and the station memsahibs. I had moments of blushing embarrassment. Once, when I heard an aircraft droning over, I jumped on a borrowed bicycle and pedalled furiously down the straight dusty road to an improvised landing ground. The chain jumped off, and, getting mixed up with the spokes, ripped several of them out. I landed in the grit, tore my trousers, and sat there staring lugubriously at the wreck.

Then I heard a car and leapt into the middle of the road to flag it. Unhappily for me it contained the Colonel—the cantonment God. He informed me coldly that the aircraft was not MacLaren's but merely a Bristol fighter that had flown over from Delhi to bring a Group Captain. Then he went on and I dolefully pushed the machine back to the Dak bungalow, feeling heavily snubbed.

MacLaren did not arrive. Instead a telegram came for the Colonel saying that he had made a forced landing on the edge of the Sind desert at an obscure little place called Parlu, some miles from Jodhpur. I pleaded with the Group Captain to take me there in his Bristol fighter, though secretly I was terrified at the idea. To my intense relief he refused because, he said, the landing would be tricky. He filled the fighter with tinned provisions and bottles of beer. Then he took off on a trial flight round the airfield. Unfortunately his prediction about the landing was somewhat prematurely fulfilled. Something went wrong. As he attempted to land the undercarriage seemed to crumple up and the machine momentarily disappeared in a cloud of dust. I rushed up expecting to find a corpse. The Group Captain was lifting himself coolly out of the cockpit, flicking dust off his trousers and looking at his watch: "What time's the next train to Delhi?" he asked.

I myself set off for Parlu, though I had not the remotest idea how I could get there. The journey turned out to be

long and tedious, but not too difficult. I remember that it involved an interminable wait at a place somewhat called Luni Junction; I remember also that I lost my train with my bearer because he had added twelve empty water bottles to the mountain of kit that accompanied me everywhere. I was then filled with remorse at the discovery that they were worth eight annas each. Certainly the labour to carry all this stuff was cheap enough.

Eventually we found ourselves on a single track line that rambled across scrub country in the general direction of Karachi. The train did not hurry itself. It was anxious to carry a sahib. Everybody was most agreeable and perfectly prepared to hold up the train while the sahib ate his meal. At last we came to rest at a small stone building in a dreary setting of dusty, unidentifiable shrubs.

"Parlu, sahib," said my bearer. I dismounted, looking distastefully at an undulating waste of sand and I began to vaguely to get a taxi or something. There were no taxis but there was, strange to say, a line of camels squatted down alongside the line. I approached one of the scorching-looking drivers, pointed to the scorching empyreal machine, made a buzzing noise. In any other country this would have been certifiable. Here, however, a look of delight and animation came over his pitted face. I climbed on board with a gasp; the ugly syphilitic beast lurched to its feet, and we trotted over the desert at a smart trot.

My only previous experience of camel riding had been at the London Zoo, where they provide a proper saddle. I had to ride astride, an effort which nearly splits the pelvis frame asunder. It took me many days to recover.

Only a few miles from the railway, I found two British airmen, MacLaren having gone back to Karachi for his spare parts. Although crestfallen at this new misadventure, MacLaren and Andrews were enjoying themselves immensely. Provisions and drinks in great quantity and variety had arrived from Jodhpur and the Guest House at Balot had a *shamiana* was erected; chairs, tables, crockery and sundries instead of camels came. The local chieftains, known as Takore or Jagirdars, provided an unlimited number of labourers and servants. To cool the *shamiana*, the entrances were covered

with brush, and a long chain of coolies poured water over it continuously. This was my first experience of roughing it "in the blue."

We had a merry open-air dinner party dressed in pyjamas. Our conversation turned on the joys of escaping from civilisation and living the simple life. It has been better expressed recently in that song-hit "Binga binga bungle, I don't want to leave the jungle. No, no, no, NO!"

Next morning we set off early on *shikar*, riding camels, and equipped with one shot-gun among us. As I do not care for shooting or killing in any form, I did not compete for the gun, and watched my companions waste a good deal of ammunition.

Anxiously and laboriously I wrote out in long-hand, on a Press telegraph form, my first story for a London newspaper—an account of the desert camp, how the airmen had made their forced landing with the amphibian undamaged, adding some account also of their previous adventures. Then, with great reluctance, I said good-bye. Plenderleith, to whom I must have appeared as an exceptionally green and inexperienced young man, looked at me doubtfully as he said, politely, "I hope you get back all right." Actually I did safely reach Bombay, but, in contrast, they did not complete their world flight, which was eventually abandoned in the Kurile Islands, north-east of Japan. I filed my message at Luni Junction, and sceptically left it in the hands of an Indian telegraphist who pored over it by lamplight as if he were tackling a Torquemada crossword puzzle. He did a fine job with my crabbed writing, ruined by years of police-court reporting, and later I had the satisfaction of seeing a long column in the *Times of India*. My greatest moment was three weeks later when the mail arrived from London with *The Times* showing that I had secured a short "top" on the foreign page.

My biggest story and finest opportunity came with the sting and unexpectedness of a hard catch in the slips. I fumbled it badly at first, yet, in the end, somehow managed to hold it. Looking into the office one night just before



of all kinds, including murder, was fairly common in Bombay thanks to the large population of Pathans whose activities ranged from money-lending to private punitive expeditions in the best traditions of the Middle Ages. A murder was apt to get only a couple of lines, unless, of course, a European was involved.

So I handed the shooting to the grinning Khadiri who was our police reporter. Had I been more experienced and less intent on some social fixture I would have realised two things. First, that Bombay murderers normally preferred the knife; secondly, that it was odd for a shooting to occur in Bombay's best residential district and nearest approach to a beauty spot.

Dawn next day brought, with the *chota hasri*, a severe shock. Khadiri, unable either to cope with the matter himself or to find me, had enlisted the help of Sirur. They were roped in a somewhat indignant and slightly incoherent Jay who had been induced to make some hospital inquiries.

Among them they had written the first instalment of a story which eventually unfolded as one of the most sensational incidents in the twentieth-century records of India. It had all the ingredients of first-class newspaper stuff—love, hate, murder, mystery; a wealthy maharajah, his favourite court singer; conspiracy, the pluck of a British officer; the steam-roller of detection and justice working slowly and inexorably.

A queer coincidence brought the story to print. Some British officers, who were passing through Bombay, had been playing golf at the Willingdon Club. After the game, no doubt, they had a few *chota pegs*, and in mellow mood they entered a car to drive back to the Taj Mahal Hotel. As they were approaching Malabar Hill they took a fateful wrong turning. Suddenly the night air, heavy with scent from the hanging-gardens, was rent by flashes, followed by the sound of pistol shots. They discerned the vague outlines of two other cars stationary on the hill, one being slewed across the road. Then as they slowed down they could see a struggling group and hear a woman's shrill screams of pain and terror. Lieutenant Saegert (who in World War II became commander of a Commando) was first out of the car and

rushed towards three Indians who were attempting to drag a woman from one of the stationary cars. An assailant was threatening her with a knife, and another, seeing Saegert running up, fired at him. Another stabbed him savagely in the shoulder. Undeterred and extremely angry, Saegert gripped two of the men in catch-as-catch-can fashion and threw them down, thus freeing the frantic woman—afterwards revealed to be Mumtaz Begum, court singer of the then Maharajah of Indore, Sir Tukoji Rao Holkar. Saegert next attempted to drag Mumtaz into his own car, but somebody fired and hit him in the hip. He dropped Mumtaz and rushed at this man, only to be hit again, in the stomach, by another gunman's bullet.

Despite his wounds Saegert, unarmed as he was, continued the fight. Seeing Mumtaz struggling with two other men, he attacked them both and wrested a knife from one of them, using it to some purpose. All this desperate and confused struggle had taken only a few moments. By now, Saegert's companions, a Colonel Vickery and two lieutenants, had rushed to his aid. Among them they rescued Mumtaz and captured a man who turned out to be Shafi Ahmed, Risaldar of the Indore Mounted Police. Mumtaz's companion in the car had been murdered. He was a wealthy Mohammedan named Abdul Kadir Baula, with whom she had been living in Bombay.

After these events Saegert, making light of his wounds, drove the car to St. George's Hospital, where he was under treatment for twenty-three days. Police inquiries which followed resulted in the arrest of eight other officials of Indore State, who, with Shafi Ahmed, were later brought to trial. It ended in a sentence of death passed on three of the accused—namely Shafi Ahmed, Sham Rao Dighe, captain of the Indore Air Force, and Ponde, an officer of the Maharajah's household.

A further sequel was that in February, 1926, the Maharajah announced that he objected to the appointment of a commission by the Viceroy to investigate his alleged connection with the attempted abduction and that he had decided to abdicate in favour of his son. The Maharajah's abdication was accepted and no further inquiry was made.

But as I clasped an anxious head on that clammy morning in October, 1924, the questions racing through it were: Who is Mumtaz Begum? What does she look like? What is her story? One thing was glaringly obvious. Superhuman efforts were indicated to redeem my unfortunate lack of interest on the previous night. I hardly needed the exhortations of Low or those of the genial and nippy little editor of the *Illustrated Weekly*, a golden-hearted man named Perry.

Yanking out my Triumph motor-cycle, I chased from one end of Bombay to the other, interviewed some of the officers concerned at the Taj Mahal Hotel and penetrated into St. George's Hospital to talk to Saegert. I even had the impudence to enter the hospital where Mumtaz Begum was being treated, and, with the permission of the Sister, to approach her bedside. Bandages round her head concealed an ugly circular knife wound which her assailants had made. It might have been an accident, but it looked like a deliberate attempt to disfigure her, possibly even to cut an eye out.

On Western standards I could not describe Mumtaz as a beauty by any stretch of imagination, even allowing for the distressing circumstances in which I saw her. Her complexion was that lighter shade of brown, with a yellowish tinge, which indicated that she came from the north. She was, I believe, a Punjabi, and also a Muslim, whereas the Maharajah Holkar was a Hindu. Normally Mumtaz should have been in purdah and worn a veil over face, with a kind of grid to peer through slightly reminiscent of a knightly visor.

In the hospital ward her broad flat features were exposed to the world and wore an expression of alarm and distaste as I approached in what I conceived to be my best bedside manner. My interview then collapsed, for she did not speak a single word of English. I knew enough Urdu to comprehend that she was saying "I do not understand you." Then I retired baffled but in good order. I suppose the European equivalent would be surprising somebody in her bath.

However, I realised that if I had had a camera I might have secured an exclusive picture of the "mysterious oriental beauty" who was the woman in this sensational case. So

next day, when Mumtaz had been transferred to a police hospital, I was emboldened to make another sortie, this time accompanied by a photographer.

In news hunting much depends on the good-will of others. I was exceptionally fortunate in this case because the Irish police surgeon in charge of this hospital proved most helpful. Mumtaz was brought out on to the verandah, and the lack of purdah did not now seem to worry her in the slightest. She posed with all the shy reserve of a Hollywood film star. Excitedly I sent back to the office with my prize. Then a horrible blow fell. The photographer had been nervous, and, for some reason, all his plates came out blank.

Low urged me to go back again with another photographer, but I felt extremely doubtful about my reception. Could I expect my Irish friend to stretch his kindness a second time after such a foolish performance on our part? However, bellyaching and tiffinless, I did return. The good-tempered Irishman was unexpectedly considerate. Mumtaz posed once more. The picture that we obtained later appeared in many newspapers throughout the world, the reward of persistence.

All this had the most important consequences for me. *The Daily Telegraph* were dissatisfied with their coverage of the Mumtaz Begum affair. The reason was that their local correspondent, A. H. Byrt, professionally known as a "stringer," was operating from Delhi, the seat of Government, and could not cope adequately with events in Bombay, 750 miles away. They therefore asked him to find somebody who could act for him in Bombay. He wired to Jay, who, on receiving it, made his favourite remark that he had too much "wurrk."

Jay, for all his faults, was the soul of generosity and he offered the job to me. I snapped at it eagerly and thankfully, thus beginning an association with the greatest newspaper in Great Britain, a connection which has lasted twenty-three years.

The slow unravelling of the case, in which I must gratefully acknowledge the work of Sirur, provided material for a steady stream of despatches to London. Mumtaz, during her evidence in court, showed remarkable self-possession. She alleged that she became the Maharajah's mistress when

...baby girl was born. The child died. In March, 1924, while travelling to the hill station Mussoorie, accompanied by one of the Maharajah's A.D.C.s, she left the train at Delhi and sought protection of the British police. Later she came to Bombay and met Baula.

Mumtaz continued to show astonishing composure and quick-wittedness during a grilling cross-examination in court lasting altogether, on successive days, ten hours. She admitted that she knew the Indore Durbar (Council) was taking steps to secure her extradition on a charge of stealing jewellery, but insisted that she was unwilling to remain in Indore after the circumstances of the death of her baby. Despite defending counsel's attempts to falsify her statement that she became the Maharajah's mistress at eleven years of age, she insisted on this assertion and that her present age was only twenty-two. Indians, it must be remembered, mature early and tend to die young.

Mumtaz, at the time, was described as the Maharajah's "favourite dancing girl," but a more accurate description was "court singer." Baula had left her a considerable sum in English money about £7,500. After the trial she aspired to become a film star and was cast for the leading part in a production called *The Slave Girl of Agra*—that of the Emperor Jehangir's daughter. She also married the son of a rich Muslim. They were divorced in 1929.

My messages to *The Daily Telegraph* initiated me into the art of writing "cabalese," a method of running words together thus saving cost, by using prefixes and suffixes. For example "ad" meant "to," "Cum" meant "with," "pr" meant "before" when put in front of words. "Warding" at the end of a word meant "going to." "Et" could be tacked on fore or aft meaning "and." This gibberish was a delight to accountants because it reduced the huge cable bills but was sometimes anathema to sub-editors faced with the task of deciphering and re-writing late at night. A sentence might read like this. "Mumtaz evidencing seemed bettern yesterday health etspirits stop Said outwent cumtwo Gurkha personal guards stop." And so on. It was a temptation

correspondents to introduce fantastic innovations, not always approved by the cable company, and usually detested by the sub-editors. The worst crime was taking liberties with proper names. What could anybody make of this, for instance? "Phanse indorewarded postexchanging cryptic telegrams cumponde." Unless, of course, he knew that Phanse and Ponde were two of the defendants. In fact there is a powerful school of thought in Fleet Street which denounces all cabalese.

However, at that period, deeply conscious of my responsibility as the possessor of a "Collect" card which enabled me to telegraph anything to London without paying, and also enjoying the novelty of it, I wrote "cabalese" with zest.

It happened, about this time, that the genial Perry went off on leave and left me to my consternation in complete charge of the *Illustrated Weekly*. Nominally Sheppard was the editor, but he seldom interfered. This meant that I had to choose the pictures and articles, sub-edit and write the gossip for a magazine comprising fifty or sixty large pages. There were also competitions to organise, including the first crosswords, and a weekly photographic competition. Entrants in the photographic contest were apt to send in pictures which had already been awarded a prize some years before. I believe that one ingenious person made a fairly regular income out of it until, by accident, I spotted his trick.

There was also a limerick competition to supply the best conclusion to "There once was a blood of Bombay." Most entries were pornographic and not very original. The winner's ran :

*There once was a blood of Bombay  
Who cloped with a fair coryphée.  
Stout and oysters at Green's  
Was the time-honoured means  
He adopted to lead her astray.*

It was not my choice. I was deemed too young and unsophisticated to judge the fruity limericks submitted. So

Our curious isolation from the real India, its life and its work, was naturally reflected in my editorship. We were living in an oasis of self-indulgence in an Eastern slum. Bombay mill-workers, in the overcrowded tenement *chawls*, were living under conditions infinitely worse than anything I had experienced or seen in London's East End. It was common to find two or more families sharing a room, and as many as thirty adults and children had been known to exist in a room fifteen feet by twelve. The *chawl* dwellers had communal water supply and primitive sanitation. Often the father, who kept up his spirits with cheap liquor and heavy soporific drugs, was hopelessly in debt and paying a wage-levy to some intermediary who had enticed him from his village with the bait of higher wages.

It is only fair to add that the conditions today, now that India is governing herself, are no better. Indeed some recent visitors have told me that they are worse.

Nevertheless, I made efforts to reach out to the mystic India of the story-books and to understand the life of its 700,000 crude villages. One such endeavour was a hunt for evidence of the Indian rope trick. Readers were invited to send in accounts of anything they had seen remotely resembling the classical trick. This produced no tangible result for a long time. Then an Englishman named Stanley Jepson who later became editor of the *Illustrated Weekly* sprang a terrific surprise. He produced a film of the whole trick, performed by a shaggy-bearded *sadhu*.

Sure enough, a rope was flung in the air, and then stiffened. A skinny boy climbed to the top and vanished—or rather faded away. Then the *sadhu*, blood-lust in his eyes and sword in mouth, clambered up after the boy. He slashed wildly at the air and bits of the boy materialised, falling amid torrents of blood among the horrified spectators. Next the *sadhu* climbed down and revealed the boy, safe and sound, under a cloth.

I was immensely impressed, until Jepson suddenly confessed that the whole thing was a fake. He won an amateur cinema competition with his film.

One day, however, a letter which had every impress of authenticity arrived from an officer on the North-West

Frontier. It described the trick in detail, without the gory part, as seen by the writer. Possibly it was a leg-pull. I don't know, but I wanted to investigate. Occult powers had determined that I should not, for I left India before I had the chance.

All these activities made it possible for me now to join, with conviction, in Jay's complaint that I had "too much wur-r-r-k." Yet I enjoyed ecstatically this swift, dream-like transformation of *The L and S* into a prosperous, printed magazine, circulating over an area larger than Europe. I was also paid extra for it, and I reckoned that my income, from all sources, was now about £800 a year. Not bad, I thought, complacently, for an inexperienced youth of twenty-three. I learnt one of life's most important lessons, namely, that hundreds of brilliant men where they are not wanted are worth less than one not so gifted where he *is* wanted.

Tom Clarke, writing in *My Northcliffe Diary*, says that he was offered £800 a year by Lord Northcliffe to be news editor of the *Daily Mail*! However, when he demurred, Northcliffe raised it to £1,000.

So, week by week, with aid of only one Indian secretary and a charming Englishman with the appropriate name of Comfort, who made up the art supplements, I put the *Illustrated Weekly* to bed. I have given up the attempt to calculate how many scores of assistants would be required to do the job on an equivalent publication in London. Sport and play had to continue, too, slightly less intensively. But it was too much. Fate was reflectively poisoning a knock-out. I was about to tumble off the steps again.



## CHAPTER SIX

### WALKING MIRACLE

MAURICE GORHAM, the former B.B.C. Television Controller once remarked to me that I started where most other journalists leave off—namely with a liver abscess. Having recorded his wisecrack I will now tell the story in my own way. In these days of psychiatry witchcraft I feel there is some interest both in the origin of the trouble and the cure.

My worst affliction in Bombay was a recurring fit of violent nostalgic depression. Many times I felt indescribably lonely, desperate to return home and escape from this clogged, steaming, stinking land for ever.

It was my practice, when I fell sick, to go immediately to St. George's Hospital. The chummery was used for many purposes. Sometimes it resembled a Wild West saloon, and once Jay completed the illusion by taking pot shots at a wandering cat—a real one—with his revolver. It could not, however, be regarded as a nursing home. So I always ran a hospital.

One morning I had been drilling on the beach with the Light Horse and returned to the chummery, extremely fatigued, with a curious feeling of heaviness on my right side where, in my ignorance of anatomy, I imagined my right lung to be situated. I slumped on the bed, unable to eat any breakfast, or, for that matter, to take any interest in the solicitous inquiries of Low, Linklater, and Jay. The heavy lump persisted all day and I could not work. I thought it was indigestion, but as the thermometer showed a slight temperature I followed my usual technique and went to hospital. There I languished in bed, unable to eat or sleep, yet not in any great pain. It was just a heavy, dull, immovable lump. The house surgeon was puzzled and could not diagnose. Next morning a brisk and cheerful major of

Indian Medical Service arrived on the scene. He looked at my temperature chart and read the medical report. Then he said: "Sit up, please."

I obliged, wearily, sadly. He gave me a sharp tap on one side and inquired: "Did that hurt?" I said: "No." He then repeated the process on the other side and I winced. His smile faded momentarily.

"You have a liver abscess, I'm afraid, Mr. Gander," he said tensely. Then added: "You must have an operation tomorrow morning."

I was shattered. This monstrous thing could not happen to me. But it had and it would. All the horrible stories with which chummery drinking parties regaled themselves about St. George's operations flooded upon me in that awful moment. It was unthinkable. I did not feel bad enough for it; I was too young to die. There was some formality of agreeing to the operation, but the Major rushed ahead with his preparations with disconcerting rapidity. I wrote what I conceived to be a brave last letter to my mother; I had what was definitely not a brave last interview with a kindly, loyal friend named Foster, who was deeply moved.

I did not believe that I had an abscess, I did not believe in the operation, I did not believe that I should survive. The cry-baby, the mother's darling, the aspiring journalist, the *chota sahib* were to be wiped off the slate like the scribble of a thoughtless child.

All ghastly things have to happen at dawn. On the crowing of the cock, I was swathed mummy-fashion in blankets and, feeling half-moribund already, was wheeled into a lift by a charming Eurasian nurse, who said soothing things. As I was lying flat I could not see much in the operating theatre. I longed to sit up, stare round and take a few notes. I wondered whether the fearful instruments of this gory trade looked anything like the neat rack of carpenter's tools at school. Then I reflected that it would be useless to write notes, as I was the only person who could read my shorthand. The efficient Major had arrived and was washing his hands in carbolic. He was always washing his hands. That was good, I supposed. He was whispering things to the nurse. That was bad, I supposed. The annoying thing was that I

did not feel at all seriously ill, if it had not been for the infernal lump of dough. And now I was irrevocably committed, and lying on the slab, I did not even feel in the least frightened.

So this was what it was like to die. A trumpet-shaped object was put over my face, and a soft voice said "Count . . ."

. . . . .

I awoke to find myself propped up in bed. The dull pain had not gone, not altogether. Only now there was another pain, a sharper one. I was intensely surprised to be still alive, and, at first, distinctly relieved. Then I made the hideous discovery that something was protruding from my side. It was a drainage tube.

Sitting still was uncomfortable; moving was not merely uncomfortable but almost impossible. I reflected bitterly that my second condition was worse than the first. So I sat day after day, night after night, sleepless, still unable to eat, my temperature persistently above normal. The little Eurasian nurses tended me lovingly. My friends came to see me in a mournful procession, trying to conceal their concern. One pretended that he had only come to borrow my one-eyed horse.

A patient in the bed opposite died. They had had a screen round his bed for some time, and that was a bad sign. Consequently to think of it, they had a screen round my bed, too. My amusements were strictly limited and localised. I was particularly fascinated by the curious methods of the *hamam* who was supposed to clean the floor every morning. He had a rag tied on a piece of string. He dipped this in water and flicked it about the tessellated floor.

Grand Guignol diversion was supplied by a puce patient in a few beds away who was tormented by pink elephants and blue devils. The Major, a most likeable and conscientious man, saw me twice a day and was plainly anxious. I suspected now that he was a clever psychologist as well as a surgeon. One morning he studied my temperature chart more earnestly than usual. Putting it down thoughtfully, he said

you ought to be. I'm terribly sorry, but if your temperature isn't down by tomorrow morning I'm afraid I must have another go at you."

He was terribly sorry; I was terribly frightened. It did the trick. Something happened during the following twenty-four hours in the delicate and mysterious mechanism of the body. This process was assisted by Sheppard, who came to see me and said that, of course, there would be no difficulty about my going home on leave. The next morning my temperature had dropped to normal. Today I read with placid equanimity the stories of yogis who make a practice of swallowing every known kind of poison with a preference for cyanide of potassium, and who regularly take hors-d'œuvres of broken bottles and rusty nails. I believe in the dominance of mind over body, though I think that the balance is subtly delicate.

The Major was delighted, and expressed his relief without mincing words. "There's nothing a surgeon hates more than having a second go at the same job," he said candidly. "You get all sorts of adhesions, you know. Very difficult." After that he showed me off as his star patient. One thing puzzled me. Why should a young man who was regarded as "practically a teetotaller" among the parched sahibs go down with a complaint which I had thought was confined to dipsomaniacs? The Major explained that it was an amoebic abscess caused by the dysentery bug which had disobligingly secreted itself in the liver. Personally, I thought that poor morale was the cause.

So I began to recover and my spirits soared. A light-hearted Merchant Navy officer was in the next bed. He and I became the life and soul of the party. Perry, who combined good nature with energy and competence, began to wind up my affairs. I had saved the equivalent of £300—a fortune, and he made the remarkable discovery that it was actually cheaper to turn the rupees into gold sovereigns than into notes. I toyed with the wild idea of having a sack of gold and dumping it on the kitchen table when I got home. However, it was so obviously impracticable that I finally took only twenty sovereigns and had the rest transferred to a London bank.

I had no regrets, nothing but joy in my heart at the prospect of leaving India. No regrets? Perhaps one, namely that I had seen so little of the country. It amazed me that so many Europeans were content to live in Bombay year after year, going to and from the office and the Gymkhana, as ignorant of Benares, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras as if they had never stirred from England.

Between bouts of illness I was given a few weeks' sick leave. I horrified office colleagues by proposing to visit Delhi, Agra and Simla, instead—as they suggested—of going to the local hill station of Nasik to play golf.

Nevertheless I carried out this project, and obtained a free ticket to Agra from the G.I.P. Railway by promising to write a guide to Agra and the deserted Moghul city of Fatehpur Sikri. As I lay in bed the half-developed film of my mind carried a few lasting images of enduring beauty and faded glory, limned in the haze of heat and squalor. The Taj Mahal at sunrise, a picture of elegance and purity by the black Jumna—like a lily-white maiden in symmetry and pristine grace; the great courtyard among the red palaces of Fatehpur Sikri where Akbar played his human chess; the clustering deodars and the mighty, spangled valleys of Simla. But there was no sound track on it yet, no “call of the East” for me. The song in my heart was “Put me somewhere *west* of Suez.” How could I guess that something besides bacteria had entered my blood, that in years to come I should dream of Bombay, that I should eventually return to it as to a home-coming?

I duly wrote the guide-book, which was an agglomeration of my own descriptive efforts and those of a number of previous authors who had also attempted the impossible task of doing justice to ethereal beauty in architecture. The unknown Moghul artists, who carved marble like lace and poised faery battlements and minarets on the skyline, made the pen a clumsy tool. Florid writing seemed inevitable, but wealth of adjectives still could not equal the lavish display of wealth with which imagination played. This guide-book, which I have before me today, says: “The audience hall of the city of Shahjahanabad was roofed with silver, and the throne, standing on five feet of solid gold set around with

pearls, blazed with rubies, emeralds and diamonds, a peacock flashing a tail of sapphires and other stones above it, the Koh-i-Nor sending a dull gleam from the front of its pearl-fringed canopy."

It all made my £300 seem a pitiful flea-bite.

The *Times of India* informed me that I could have three months' leave on half-pay, and, in case I did not wish to return, Sheppard gave me the magnificent testimonial, to which I have already referred, expressing the hope that I *would* come back. A first-class passage was booked for me in the P. & O. liner *Rawalpindi*, the same that was sunk in World War II when, as an armed merchant cruiser, she encountered the *Scharnhorst* in valiant but unequal battle.

I had no premonition that fate would one day mangle this fine ship when, wracked with internal pains, I left an ambulance and walked feebly up the gangway. I hated myself for going home a pallid wreck and for wincing with pain; I hated the steward for refusing to serve meals in my cabin. I also came to the firm conclusion that when we had put to sea St. George's Hospital would miss several surgical instruments which appeared to be wedged inside me, piercing my tenderest organs whenever I moved.

However, the miracle of recovery continued, accelerated by rest, good food, sea-air and, above all, the wonderful knowledge that I was homeward bound. By the time we reached Marseilles I was dancing on the deck. When we docked at Tilbury few glancing at the lean, bronzed traveller from Bombay would have guessed that he had recently been near death.

Then, somehow, the homecoming to which I had looked forward so longingly for two years fell flat. I missed the sun and gaiety of Bombay dreadfully. Everything seemed grey and dull; everybody seemed incredibly worried about nothing or intolerably busy about nothing. People rushed hither and thither with purposeless, gnat-like activity, grouching perpetually from morning till night. In Bombay we laughed at our misfortunes; in London they nearly wept. In Bombay they had the same word for "yesterday" and "tomorrow"; in London they clipped seconds in a mad race with time. Worst of all was the weather, the cold, wet,

bone-chilling weather. J. L. Garvin maintained that the East changes one for ever. It is so.

My dear mother, who had been distraught with grief during my illness, was overjoyed to see me, and I to see her. One comfort to her had been sympathetic letters sent by my colleagues in Bombay, in particular one from Linklater. Somehow I was oddly abashed by our meeting on board the *Rawalpindi*. She talked a different language from me now, poor soul, and didn't realise it. She said she had "dinner" waiting for me at home, to which I replied somewhat awkwardly that it was awfully kind but I had just had "lunch." Nevertheless, I somehow forced down the dinner as well.

Then I realised with a rush that I could not come back to the narrow house and the narrow world of Stratford, that I had metamorphosed into somebody else. I was extremely fond of Mother, but, alas, she acted on me like acid on litmus paper. I simply could not go on for ever as the spoiled child.

The I.M.S. Major had sternly admonished me to go into hospital on arriving in London. However, I felt so well, except for occasional spasms of pain, that I was determined to avoid it if I could. I made my way through the brick-desert of a neurotic and discontented London—it was near the General Strike time—to the consulting-room of an eminent Harley Street consultant, specialist in tropical diseases.

He carried out a systematic and patient examination, listening resignedly when I explained my aversion to hospitals. Then, to my intense surprise, he said: "You're all right. No malaria, no dysentery. Don't bother about hospital. Go off and play golf."

It was strange how the whole world was in collusion to make me play golf. I expressed my gratitude to the eminent consultant and pointed out that (a) I did not play golf, (b) when I attempted to play it was apt to plunge me into paroxysms of uncontrollable rage. He said: "Oh well, walk. Take some gentle exercise. Don't worry. You're all right. In three months you'll be perfectly able to go back to India."

This was a further shock. Although London was anathema to me, with human perversity I did not in the least relish returning to India. Nevertheless I left his consulting-room with a light heart and a jaunty step. The death sentence had been finally commuted to hard labour for life. Cowards die many times before their end, but each reprieve is sweeter than the last.

I went to Clacton, where some relatives had a hotel, and tried to keep to a prescribed regimen. Motor-cycles still held a fatal fascination for me and I blued about £40 on a new Douglas. The purchase looked like penetrating foresight when, a few weeks later, the General Strike paralysed the nation. In the hotel my placid cousin Richard was playing with an irritating box affair that he called a crystal set. It appeared that this instrument had suddenly become our sole source of news, and without it we were back in the eighteenth century. He wore headphones, and when the delicate cat's-whisker adjustment was right a beatific expression would come over his face. He retailed to the guests the strike news from London, as broadcast by 2LO. If memory serves, he then bought a valve set with a croaking loud-speaker.

Wireless, which had hitherto been something of a toy and a joke, became in a stroke a vital necessity. Other Cousin Richards in other households were also hanging on to 2LO as to an invisible life-line. A revolution in communication, even more important than Caxton's exploitation of printing, had begun in 1921-22, but it was only in 1926 that the nation fully realised it.

My imagination was stormed. In the 'teen years wireless had meant the joyful, strident music of the Savoy Orpheans and the cultured, often affected accents, of B.B.C. speakers and announcers. I thought that the wireless set was just a marvellous improvement on the musical box, the pianola, or the gramophone. Now I saw it was much more than that. It could open new worlds of information, education, and entertainment, of spiritual and mental development. It was no respecter of purses or of persons. As Sir John (now Lord) Reith, the first general manager, said: "The same music rings as sweetly in mansion as in cottage. . . . The genius



and the fool, the wealthy and the poor, listen simultaneously."

At that time I had not the faintest idea of becoming a radio correspondent or critic, but, if I thought about the matter at all, I could see no purpose in antagonism between the Press and Broadcasting. The role of Canute is proved to be utterly futile. On the other hand, it seemed to me that immense benefits could accrue to both newspapers and the B.B.C. from mutual co-operation.

So far from planning my future career as a radio correspondent, I was worrying my head about my duty in the national crisis, and failed utterly to reach any definite conclusion. My sympathies were with the miners who started it all, but it was obvious that the General Strike would become a constitutional challenge. Though my members of the National Union of Journalists had lapsed during my service in India, I knew that members of the Union had been instructed to "down pens." So I fretted and dithered.

One day, in this state of indecision, I bestrode my motor bicycle and went off to Oxford. The object was to visit a Canadian girl whom I had met on board the *Rawalpindi*. Her father was a visiting professor and her brother a captain. When I arrived, covered with dust, this charming, foreign girl was, in her own flattering idiom, "tickled to death." Then she asked me, disconcertingly, if I were despatch rider. Making up my mind with a sudden rush, I said, "No, because I think the miners are quite right."

She recoiled from this thimbleful of cold water. Oxford was almost as excited and impetuous as—report said—London had been in August, 1914. Throughout the country there was a rush of volunteers to work on the railways, in the docks, on buses and trams, and in innumerable other capacities. Outspoken critics said that many a staid and pampered youth was doing the first real day's work in his life. However, although deploring the thoughtless and unconscious zeal with which they set about strike smashing, I envied them their decision, and their activity. De

"Canada," as I called her, was kind enough to overlook my disaffection. She took me on a tour of Oxford in her Morris car, and I was consumed with a gangrenous envy, slowly cured by the beauty and peace of weathered grey stone and centuries-old lawns. I was lost in admiration for the confident self-possession of the undergraduates; a refinement of errand-boy's insolence. I wondered how many undergraduates were actually paying for themselves by scholarship, and reflected that on my Bombay earnings I could probably have paid for *myself* three times over. Would I have exchanged my independence for this, I asked myself?

We had lunch with the professor and "Canada's" brother, rounded off with Magdalen port, which, I shamefacedly admit, I gulped down unappreciatively. Somehow I did not feel that my visit went with a swing, despite "Canada's" superhuman efforts. I expressed my sincere thanks, returned to Clacton and did not see "Canada" again for some years, our next and only other meeting being accidental.

In the summer, the strike over, I went to Switzerland with brother Allan. We idled, walked and talked in a Himalayan miniature, a picture-postcard country, a millionaire's playpen. Byron's Castle of Chillon and the green rushing Rhone, the snowy peaks, and the placid blue of Lake Geneva were balm to eager eyes. The spotless Swiss hotels and streets, trams innocent of scattered tickets, the castle turrets, and the steep pine woods were a European Paradise after tropical purgatory.

In ecstasy, we tramped the zig-zag mountain roads behind Montreux. Allan adopted the slow, plodding pace of the Alpine guide. I, with other companions, went in headlong rushes. When we paused for breath Allan invariably overtook us, thus repeating over and over again the lesson of the tortoise and the hare. We took the Lake steamer to Geneva and gazed with awed and thankful hearts at the buildings of the League of Nations. Humbly and gratefully we thanked Providence for arranging that in our lifetime men would forever turn their backs on war and settle their differences by arbitration. Mankind had renounced war, and here was the solid proof in stone, set appropriately in surroundings of natural beauty and advanced civilisation.

The painted mountains hid the world from our eyes as a drop-curtain of a theatre hides the back-stage machinations.

We left with infinite reluctance, returning by way of P. A letter from Sir Stanley Reed had pursued me to Swi land. He asked me whether I would see him to discuss future plans. I sent a somewhat impudent reply suggesting that if he would pay my air fare to London I should be to come. Sir Stanley, most tolerant and courteous of replied that I need not hurry myself and he would arrange a meeting when I finally returned to London.

Back in London I became more and more oppressed by my personal problem. Should I or should I not return to India? I called one day, scared to death, at *The Telegraph* office in Fleet Street. It was extraordinary that the passing years had not made me any more self-confident on these job-hunting expeditions. However, being their correspondent in Bombay, I did have some excuse for my visit. I inquired, at a glass-fronted cubicle in the dark hall, for "Mr. Watson," my letter of appointment having been signed by "Arthur E. Watson, managing editor."

There was the usual pause for internal telephoning, then I was taken into a waiting-room on the first floor and sat there quaking. After a minute or two a large bespectacled man, who towered above me, strode briskly in and began talking in a quiet and friendly voice. I explained my problem and answered a few questions about India, wondering all the time who he could be. I did not think it possible that a great editor, immersed in his important work, could find time to see a nonentity of twenty-four from Bombay. Unable to restrain my curiosity, I asked him outright. It was Mr. Arthur Watson. He was, as it happened, particularly interested in India because his brother, Sir Arthur Watson, was editor of the *Calcutta Statesman*.

He was good enough to say that my work on the Mumtaz Begum case had been much appreciated. Greatly emboldened, I came to the point, and asked whether, as India did not suit my health, there was any chance of a job in London. This did not disturb his calm—in fact during twenty-two years I have found that nothing ever does, however violent

unexpected or unwelcome it may be. He merely looked a little dubious, I thought, but began to read some cuttings from the *Times of India* which I diffidently offered for inspection. Eventually he said, in the same quiet, unruffled voice, that he was afraid they had no vacancy at present. Then he added something which caused a great surge of hope. "But come and see me again."

I did not know Fleet Street well enough to realise how encouraging that last remark was.

About a week later, my future still unsettled, I called upon Mr. Watson once more. Again he was good enough to see me, despite all other preoccupations, but again he regretted having nothing to offer.

I had my interview with Sir Stanley, who offered a substantial increase of salary and another three-years contract. It was a graduated scale, rising, as far as I remember, to about Rs. 750 a month (£58). I did not think this was enough to justify the risk to health and so I consulted Allan about it. He replied: "I cannot see what the salary has got to do with it. No money can compensate you for loss of health." The obvious truth, like a brilliant light in darkness, made all clear. I sat down, and, without further hesitation, wrote a letter to Sir Stanley expressing gratitude for all his consideration, and resigning.

After cutting the painter, I felt better, despite the niggling anxiety of being unemployed. In the meantime I had been bombarding every paper in the British Isles with applications for a job, and, from the disappointing replies, came rapidly to the conclusion that letter-writing, in general terms, was useless. Shaw had said this.

I had been unemployed for exactly one week when I saw a letter on the mat in a *Daily Telegraph* envelope. Not daring to hope, I tore it open. Mr. Watson was asking me to come and see him, for the third time. Even to a confirmed pessimist—as I then was—it was now obvious that he intended to offer me something, and I wondered anxiously whether I was to be a holiday reporter or sub-editor. All imaginings fell short of the truth.

When I stood palpitating in that heavily furnished, dimly lit waiting-room for the third time Mr. Watson entered and,

coming straight to the point, said in his even tones: "D'you know anything about wireless, Gander?"

I thought of my friends' experiments with crystal sets and of my struggles to put up a stupendous aerial at Romford Road; I thought of the General Strike broadcasts; I thought of the fanatic who had persuaded me to sit up all night in Bombay listening to hideous crackling and frying noises on the pretext of being able to hear London; I thought of the smooth tones of Stuart Hibberd and A. J. Alan.

Cautiously I answered: "A certain amount." Mr. Watson then said that he had a "little job" to offer. It was to be radio correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* at the minimum salary of £9 9s. a week.

I rank this as the greatest surprise in my life. In later years I was far less taken aback when, on the island of Leros, German parachutists began to drop near me. Then I began to wonder whether my lack of technical knowledge might not be a fatal handicap. Yet I was in no position to refuse. So, with many expressions of gratitude, and—on the principle of trying anything once—I grabbed at the offer eagerly. It was arranged that I should start at the end of August, and I went home jubilantly, only half believing in my good luck. I have felt eternally grateful to Mr. Watson for this great opportunity.

Consumed with doubts about my capacity for the new job, I went to West Ham Municipal Library and borrowed every book I could find on the subject of wireless telegraphy. They plunged me into blackest despair, and a jungle of jargon about ohms, watts, condensers, resistances, electrodes, and wave-forms.

Actually, although all this reading was useful and educational, some of my anxieties were needless. *The Daily Telegraph*, after experiment, had decided that broadcasting could best be dealt with in a newspaper, like all other specialised subjects, by a trained journalist whose chief aim would be to get news and present it readably. Broadcasting, though at a transitional stage when many people were still making their own sets and boasting darkly about the way they had assembled the "Melody twin," or the "Solodyne," was primarily a medium of entertainment, just like the

theatre, the cinema, or the concert hall. The music critic did not tell his readers how to make a piano; the theatre critic did not tell them how to make a puppet show.

On the other hand there were profound differences and difficulties. Broadcasting was new and fluid. When a dramatic critic wrote about a first night he was informing a potential audience, giving them the benefit of his experienced judgment. A radio production was heard instantaneously by everybody who wanted to hear it, and was dead by the following morning. Moreover, broadcasting covered an immense range, from jazz to Beethoven, from the Children's Hour to Ibsen. A superman would be required to do justice to all these aspects, instead of which—it seemed to me—a superboy had the job.

I discovered that my chief work was to write a daily "introduction" to the broadcasting programmes, in order to leaven the solid mass of the small type. The newspapers, in the early days of broadcasting, had been strongly opposed to the publishing of these programmes free, but one newspaper, defying the rest, had insisted upon it. So all had to fall into line, but they grudged the space. *The Daily Telegraph*, in starting a daily radio "column," was pioneering. The *Evening News* had a similar, rather more extensive feature, written by a highly intelligent and versatile Balliol man called Jack Bergel, but it was many years before the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* followed suit. I particularly admired Jack Bergel's handling of the subject, and was privately amused at contemplation of the different routes by which he and I had reached the same destination.

On the whole, the best treatment for broadcasting in a newspaper seemed to be news and gossip, looking forwards rather than backwards, the main object being to inform readers rather than impose opinions upon them. Somehow, this treatment of broadcasting by the Press seemed to offend the dignity of the B.B.C. High officials were apt to talk about the "low standards" of radio criticism and to refer in supercilious fashion to Ruskin and Hazlitt—as if either of those gentlemen would have had anything but hot denunciation for the spate of vulgar trash and low-quality sound gushing from millions of primitive loud-speakers. The

B.B.C. were, in fact, hypnotised by the immense size of the fast-swelling monster which they controlled. As its size was prehistoric I suppose it was natural for the B.B.C. masters to be peering myopically into the past for standards of radio criticism, without recognising the limitations of their flat aural medium.

On the credit side, it must be said that—largely owing to the high moral character of Sir John Reith—the B.B.C. had as one of its chief aims the improvement of public taste. Jazz was the sweetmeat or the bait. Chamber music, uplift and education were the solid food. We pioneer critics, while occasionally grouching that B.B.C. programmes were dull, pontifical or pompous, were conscious of echoes from across the Atlantic which showed the depths to which broadcasting could sink when weighed down with commercialism.

Sir John's appointment as Director-General had been one of the lucky accidents of history, simply the result of answering an advertisement. His character was an enigma to the listening public. They knew that he was dark and Scottish; an Abraham Lincoln in figure and Alistair Sim in face; a Sabbatarian and a Puritan. I, closer to the heart of things, speedily realised that he was also a brilliant organiser and one who inspired deep respect among his staff. His shyness of the Press, however, made him unapproachable. To me he was, for many years, nothing but a tall dark shadow striding through the entrance at Savoy Hill or across the hall at Broadcasting House. Any suggestion that I should meet the great Sir John was treated in the same way as the request of child to handle a red-hot poker. Sir John, no doubt, intended that this attitude would cause the Press to forget him. On the contrary, his inaccessibility stirred up curiosity and his reticence, like that of Mr. Montagu Norman, of the Bank of England, was a constant challenge.

Sir John was a "dictator" only in the sense of the strong man who knew his own mind and intended to keep a firm hand on the wheel. He believed in devolution of authority, and the whole basis of his B.B.C. organisation was committee management. The strict moral principles which he applied governed the conduct of staff in the office, as it

affected their daily work and daily contacts. Much has been written and said about alleged interference with "private lives," including a great deal of bunkum. This much can be said. Sir John had principles which, right or wrong, are upheld traditionally in this country by prime ministers and prelates. He applied them courageously and impartially. To put it plainly, he would not tolerate any "funny business" in the office or the studio.

Maurice Gorham writes in *Sound and Fury*: "I never knew an office where sex played so large a part." One asks: What offices had Mr. Gorham known? After the publication of this book, one B.B.C. official came to me and said: "I would like you to publish the statement that I have been a member of the B.B.C. staff for fifteen years and I have not been outraged yet."

The fact is that the B.B.C. is a publicity machine with almost frightening power. Anything connected with it is apt to be seized upon and inflated with ridiculous exaggeration. There may have been locked-door incidents at Savoy Hill; there *were* divorce cases. Certainly to be the guilty party in a divorce was the quickest way out. But to represent the B.B.C. as a hot-bed of immorality is preposterous.

Sir John is frequently described as a typical "son of the Manse." When he was at the B.B.C. I thought that his qualities were more those of a headmaster than a pastor. He was dour but just, and not without a queer humour in his dealings with the staff. On several occasions he overcame his extraordinary shyness sufficiently to appear in B.B.C. amateur theatricals—I remember him as the butler in *Tilly of Bloomsbury*.

It was ten years before I met him face to face at a luncheon party. My chief impressions of that interview are of his serious, direct manner, and his practice of hurling unanswerable questions. The man who had persistently avoided the Press in general and me in particular then suddenly swung at me, like a boxer's left lead, the remark: "Well, what do you want to know?" When I began to recover from my surprise and put a few questions, he then jabbed at me for obtaining information from unauthorised sources and unimportant people!



But although Reith was the B.B.C. and the B.B.C. was Reith, my chief dealings were with Mr. Bertie Chapman who ran the Press Department. We reporters used to call it, perhaps unjustly, the Sup-Press Department. I say unjustly, for certainly all its members did their best with utmost courtesy to help, but some higher officials were apt to be difficult.

Chapman's chief, the Director of Public Relations, was an energetic Canadian who had been a Rhodes scholar at Oxford and a flier in World War I—Major Gladstone Murray—who also made himself most accessible. He was the mysterious man of the B.B.C., who will be remembered by the public as the chief witness in the "Mongoose" libel case. Many tipped him as a possible successor to Reith. I cannot imagine a more violent contrast of personalities. Murray had a keen, mischievous transatlantic sense of humour, always liable to break out in unexpected ways. His quick voice belied his ceaseless activity. Added to everything he had a profound knowledge of the Press and had undoubted influence in Fleet Street, where his good-natured friendliness went down well. He was a formidable competitor in any language, but Reith was the winner.

Chapman was joined presently by an assistant who had also been a flier in World War I—one A. J. P. Hytch, an ex-squadron leader who had fought against Riechthofen's circuses. He brought élan and gaiety to Press relationships and—holding shrewdness and humour in fine balance—developed a news sense quicker than anybody I have ever met. Twenty years in the B.B.C. Press Department have not dimmed John Hytch's zest for life.

In my early days as a radio correspondent I soon realised that though Murray, Chapman and Hytch were all genuinely out to help, the Press Department which can please everybody participating in the jungle warfare of Fleet Street does not exist. The "hand-out," giving an equal break to all, has infinitely less attractions than an exclusive obtained by lone-wolf methods. The Press Department also has to protect the interests of its own journals, such as the *Radio Times* and the *Listener*.

Nowadays, under the capable direction of Mr. Kenneth Adam, the Department takes a liberal view of its functions.

He alone among departmental heads at the B.B.C. has direct access to the Director-General, Sir William Haley, who was himself a newspaper man before he went to the corporation, and has a proper sense of proportion where "stories" are concerned.

How, then, did one, and does one, obtain exclusive stories about the B.B.C. and its affairs? As well ask a conjurer to reveal the secret of "Walking Through the Wall." I can, however, give a few clues. The methods include a routine scouring of programmes in advance for likely ideas; systematic gossip with the right people and allowing them to get a word in edgeways; tireless listening and looking; occasional "tips-off" from friends; never breaking a confidence; methodically following up every possible line of inquiry; above all—sheer luck.

Though as a "specialist" I had wonderful freedom and independence, the job was not without its difficulties and anxieties. Now, instead of the *Bombay Chronicle* and the *Indian Daily Mail*, I had an appalling list of competitors. My immediate chief was a tall austere man called W. T. Massey, with a shock of white hair and a slight Cockney accent. He was the news editor, and had been one of the most famous war correspondents in World War I, operating in the Middle East. Reporters' room gossip said that he had been offered and refused a knighthood. My childhood dreams forgotten, it never occurred to me, even in the most optimistic moments, that I could ever succeed him as a war correspondent. He was a considerate man, but I held him in great awe and, though he seldom complained, I could see a withering reproof in his glance if I had missed anything. The fact was that my self-reproaches were far more devastating than anything he could have said.

One great trouble was that broadcasting was beginning to upset preconceived news values, as well as methods of collecting news. For instance, sporting results, heard simultaneously by millions, were no longer news. This roused, among the older hands in Fleet Street, a certain hostility to broadcasting and the B.B.C. They did not immediately realise two things: first, that broadcasting was stimulating public interest in such sporting events and

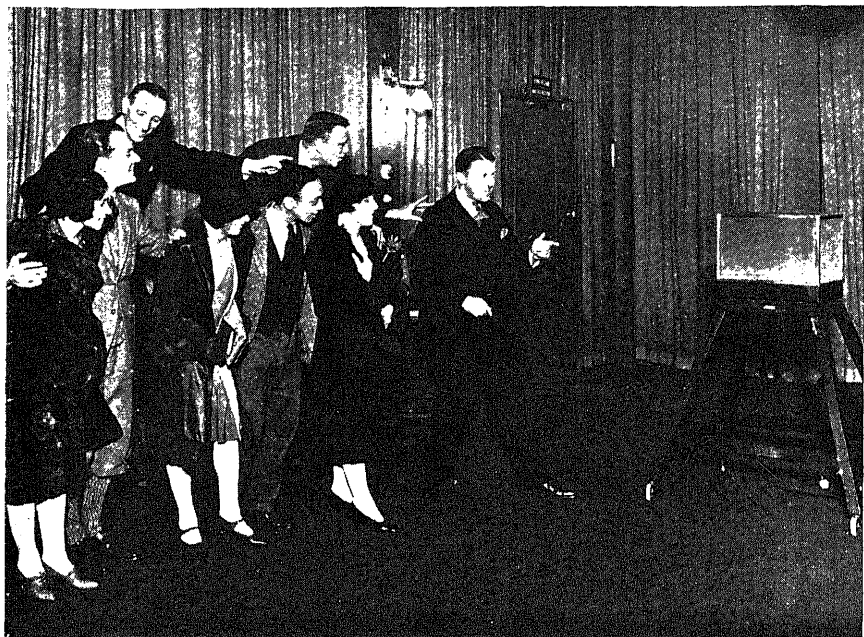
making people even more anxious to read the reports; second, that broadcasting itself was producing news. The myth that broadcasting was undermining newspapers has been finally exploded by today's circulation figures.

However, in my early days as a radio correspondent the profession was not yet accustomed to the idea that first stories of national interest could break unexpectedly on air, as in the famous instance of the B.B.C. commentator who informed us that the Fleet was "all lit up." Famous voices became news, unknown comedians sprang to prominence overnight. Broadcasting, by its universality, was making and breaking reputations, in the twinkling of an eye. At all the time, despite the earnest high-brow endeavours of the B.B.C., it was haunted by a certain triviality.

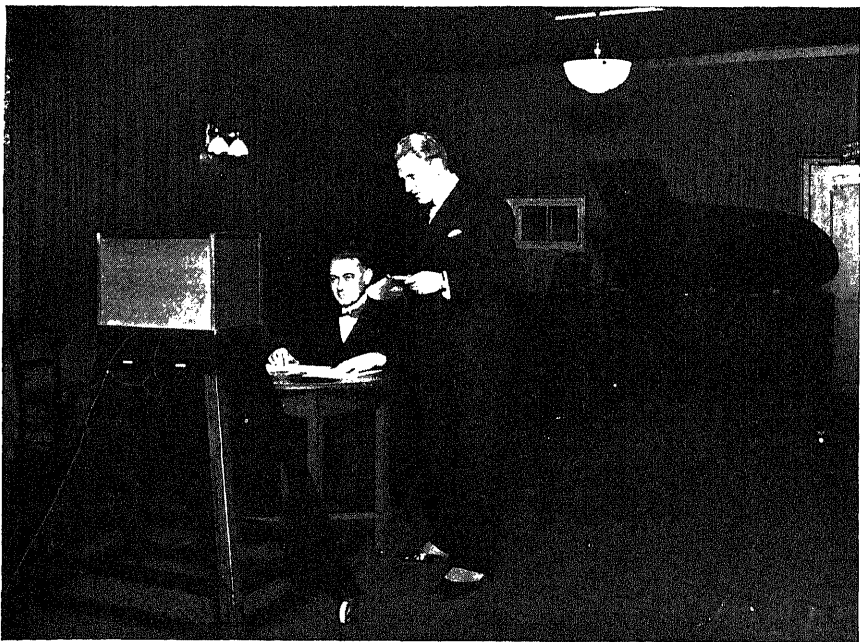
My first days at *The Daily Telegraph* were memorable encounters with the strange, hard-working fraternity of London sub-editors. Many reporters regard the sub-editor as a sub-human monster who crawls out at nights, white-faced, dressed, to sit in an overheated slaughter-house massing copy. My contacts with Jay had suggested, also, that he lived almost exclusively on alcohol. These conceptions are wildly wrong. The sub-editors' room is the highly organised engine-room of the editorial side. Copy, divided into "home," "foreign," or "sport," first goes to the "copy-tasters" on these particular subjects. This is the beginning of an elaborate process of filterings, cutting, and checking. The sub-editor, to whom a story is handed, not only has to cut to length, look out for libels and mistakes, but also has to compare a staff reporter's work with agency reports to decide whether the reporter has missed an important point. Then there is the difficult job of writing headings to fit the narrow columns. "Making-up" the columns of type on the "slab" in the composing room is a separate art, involving the ability to read the type itself.

An important newspaper executive once told me that in his opinion the road to editorship lay through the sub-editors' rather than the reporters' room.

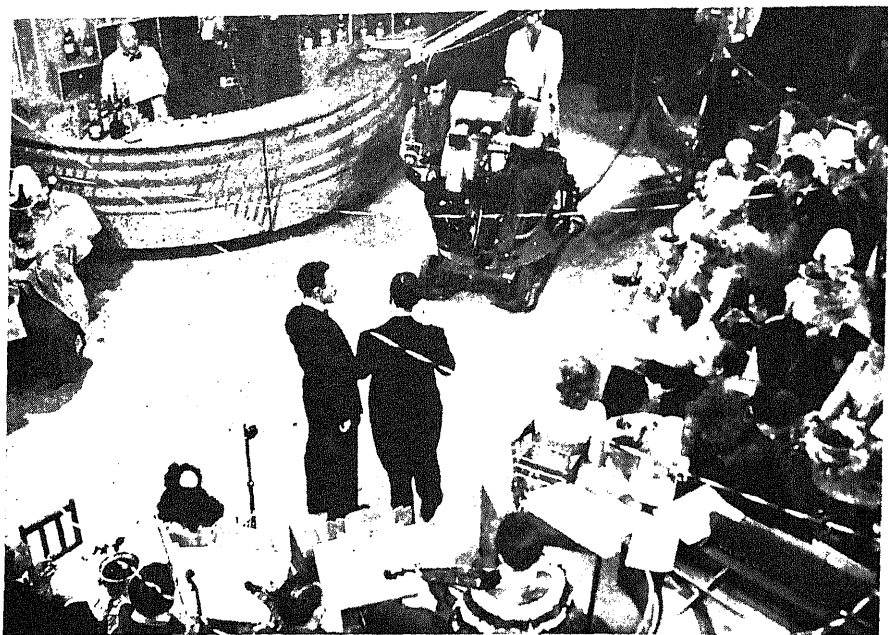
Many famous correspondents and critics have fallen foul of sub-editors. Sir Philip Gibbs, I believe, has called



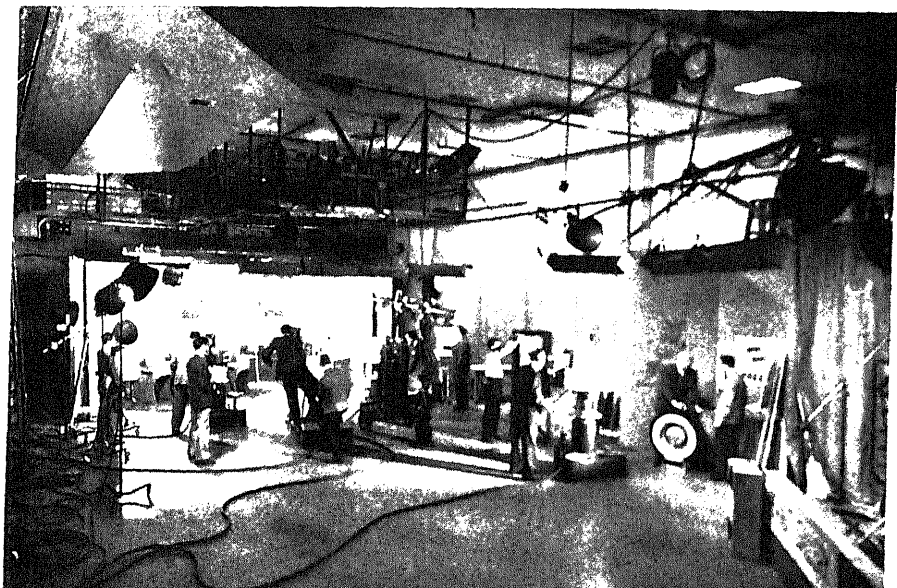
Savoy Hill days. Tommy Handley nearest microphone, John Sharman third from left.



"London Calling." Stuart Hibberd announcing M. Stephan in 1926.



B.B.C. Television : Studio scene at Alexandra Palace during "Café Continental".



the "butchers of journalism." Hesketh Pearson records that Bernard Shaw resigned from the staff of one London paper because the proprietor's wife insisted upon interpolating sentences expressing her rapturous opinion of artists who had won her heart by their hospitality.

Reporters, searching for their cherished stories in the following morning's paper, are apt to receive severe shocks. I believe that the proper philosophical attitude is to remember that the sub-editor values news with a dispassionate and objective eye, as a diamond buyer values diamonds. "What's it worth?" is on his lips and in his mind—meaning, what length and position. The absurd idea exists that all news is coloured and distorted to suit the political opinions of the particular newspaper. This is contradicted every morning of the week by the unanimity with which newspapers of many shades of opinion select the same items for front-page news. The notable exceptions of newspapers with extreme politics tend to prove the rule.

Anyway, as a specialist on *The Daily Telegraph*, I was highly privileged and my copy was practically Holy Writ. The subs. to me were, except for rare lapses, not butchers but *surgeons* who cut like *Savile Row tailors*. As befitted the youngest member of the editorial staff, I made the startling suggestion that the office should buy me a portable typewriter. This, much to the astonishment of the veteran reporters, was produced with great promptitude and the legibility of my copy proceeded to win all hearts in the subs.' and composing rooms. The office also bought me a "Solo-dyne" radio receiver, which embodied the new marvel of single-knob tuning and was the last word in simplicity of operation and long range. I toured Europe from an arm-chair, night after night, happy as a child with a new electric railway, driving the family frantic with a confusion of French, German, Dutch, Spanish and frying noises.

It was a regular demonstration that although all the countries of Europe could talk to each other with unprecedented ease, they had nothing worth saying and no common language in which to say it. "Nation shall speak peace unto nation" was the idealistic motto of the B.B.C. Yes, but in what language? If we started to talk their

languages, that would be suspiciously like propaganda and would tend to rouse distrust. It almost made me an Esperanto convert, till I came to the complacent conclusion that English itself was already a key to half the world, and becoming ever more important. Let the foreigner learn English and the whole problem would be solved the lazy way.

The chorus of hate and discord was barely pianissimo in those days, but seated in that basement of Babel a dim, uneasy realisation came upon me. I had not seen the last of war, that disease of mankind more terrifying than cancer. The hospital buildings of the League of Nations began to look pitifully inadequate, the doctor-statesmen with their clashing opinions, cunning deceptions, nostrums and prejudices were so many witch-doctors warming up for a dance of death.

In those days I was cured of disbelief in scientific miracles. I went along one day to see an eccentric Scotsman called John Logie Baird, who claimed to have developed a method of transmitting and receiving moving pictures by radio. He called it television—a word much criticised by pedants because it mixed Greek and Latin. His method was an even greater mix-up of previous ideas, plus some of his own. It may be hard to say exactly what were Baird's original contributions to the discovery of television, but there is no question that he was the first man to demonstrate it. As one authority put it, "he flogged a picture" out of his primitive apparatus by sheer persistence, application, and single-mindedness.

Like John Reith he was also a Scottish minister's son. Both in appearance and method he was the inventor of fiction. He had a mop of untidy fair hair and spectacles, a soft voice with an attractive Scottish burr, and was perpetually experimenting with any improvised apparatus that came to hand. John Baird never made extravagant claims, and always answered the questions of the numerous sceptics dispassionately and patiently. But to the lay mind television bordered on the miraculous. Many insisted that Baird was mad and, though most thought him harmless, the story goes that on one occasion he was searched for a razor.

When I first went to see John Baird he was working in an attic laboratory in Frith Street, Soho. He told me that as a boy he had always thought, by a simple logical process, that if people could talk along wires there was no reason why they should not also see. Then radio came, dispensing with the wires, and the idea of television was born. There had, of course, been many other pioneers in this field. Descriptions of rudimentary apparatus for transmitting pictures over wires began to be published in 1875. Selenium, the light sensitive properties of which suggested the possibility of transforming light into electric currents, had been known since 1817. Personally I give the most marks for ingenuity to the German-Pole Nipkow who invented a "scanning disc," making it possible to slice up the picture to be transmitted into thirty managable strips. The Nipkow disc formed an essential part of Baird's apparatus. When the strips, or slices, were reassembled rapidly at the receiving end, the phenomenon known as persistence of vision made them appear to the human eye as a complete, moving picture. So that, in a sense, television is merely a conjuring trick and the person who says "I don't believe it" is justified. Nowadays, by the way, it is not thirty lines but 405, which, tracing rapidly across the screen, perfect the illusion.

Baird went to Glasgow University, pottering about with television occasionally and exasperating his parents by cluttering up the kitchen with his selenium cell experiments. He studied engineering, and on going down from the university invented and sold a patent undersock and shoe cleaner. He had to give up this business (which I gather was not particularly profitable) when he fell ill in 1923. Using up his small capital, he went to recuperate at Hastings, and, like the true artist who will starve rather than work at anything but his art, slaved away for three years trying to make his apparatus work. He lived by eking out his modest capital, and frequently sat up all night wrestling with the great problem which now obsessed his mind and his whole life to the exclusion of everything else.

His final machine cost about 7s 6d, being made of a circle of cardboard cut from a hat-box, sixteen bull's-eye lenses



from bicycle lamps and a selenium cell. His receiver was another cardboard disc perforated with holes and mounted on a spindle. Old bicycle parts, pins and needles, and bits of driftwood from the Hastings beach were also used.

He was attempting to transmit a Maltese cross and his singular devotion to his fantasy, moved to the attic in Great Street. He had been reduced to a few pounds and even his unquenchable optimism was being damped when one day, during his ceaseless experiments, he thought he saw a shape on the receiver screen. A second later he became convinced and rushed downstairs like a maniac to grab somebody. He won the honour of being the first person in the world to be televised. He found a boy, one Willie Taynton, who was willing to humour the long-haired eccentric for half a crown and is still alive today, to rank as one of the world's lesser known celebrities. Later Baird used a ventriloquist's doll for his experiments and his original apparatus may be seen today at the Science Museum.

Captain Peter Eckersley, then the witty and enterprising chief engineer of the B.B.C.—a pioneer in his own right—recalled those who were over-sanguine about television development “televisionaries.” Nevertheless, Baird succeeded in getting financial support. He and his associates—notably A. G. D. West, who left the B.B.C. to join the Baird Company—made striking progress. It was the bitter disappointments of his life when, after a period of experimental work, the B.B.C. eventually adopted the Marconi-Hugon system of transmission for high-definition television, the reason being that the Baird method included a mechanical element.

Nevertheless, even this setback, which made it appear as if the greatest of all television pioneers would not receive his just reward, did not make him relax his efforts to improve television. He continued experiments with big screens, colour and stereoscopy until he died in 1946 aged forty-eight.

The lesson is the old one that faith, backed by unremitting efforts, will move mountains. It was not merely a coincidence that both John Reith and John Baird were mini-zealots. Each tackled his chosen task with the fanatical devotion of a religious zealot.

When I saw my first demonstration of television it was little more than a shadowgraph. Peering through a magnifying lens I saw dancing shadows, as in a glass darkly. Baird explained the numerous difficulties still to be overcome, including the apparently insuperable one that television on a medium wavelength would wipe out every sound transmission in the country. I went away disbelieving in its future. Then, in the office, I met the night news editor—a Fleet Street man named Thorpe of wide and varied experience.

I began to explain my doubts. He said: "I don't know anything about the technical side of it, but I am completely convinced that television—proper television—will one day become a commonplace." He was right and I was wrong. I am now convinced that Aldous Huxley's forecasts will fall short of future achievements. The next generation may well see something surpassing the "all super-singing, synthetic talking, coloured stereoscopic feely, with synchronised scent organ accompaniment." Imagination is always the pathfinder for invention, though, curiously enough scientists are apt to scoff at prospects beyond their immediate horizons.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TELEVISION ADDICT

WE HUMBLER members of the editorial staff were ignorant of the true trend in *The Daily Telegraph* affairs. We had no idea that (as Viscount Camrose has revealed in his book *British Newspapers and Their Controllers*) in 1927 the circulation had dropped to 84,000. The reporters fulfilled only one engagement a day, and, if it happened to be a dinner, were politely notified by post so that they might have a day off.

We did not know that the then Viscount Burnham, proprietor, who had agreed to go with the Simon Commission to India in the following year, had written to Sir William Berry (now Viscount Camrose), then editor-in-chief of the *Sunday Times*, offering to sell the paper. There was something like consternation in the office when, on December 1, 1927, a notice appeared informing us and the world that Lord Burnham had disposed of the paper to Sir William Berry, his brother Mr. Gomer Berry (now Lord Kemsley) and Sir Edward (now Lord) Iliffe.

We thought of *The Daily Telegraph* as an unchanging national institution, and were filled with doubts about its future. Lord Camrose restored confidence immediately. He addressed a meeting of the whole staff in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, convened as a compliment to Lord Burnham, telling them that any changes he contemplated would be gradual, not swift or drastic. Speaking personally, nothing but benefit has accrued to me from this change of ownership. As to the newspaper itself, today's circulation figures are eloquent enough.

Anxious to increase my experience I asked Mr. Watson to transfer me to the general reporting staff. At the same time it happened that I had an offer to go on the C

*Times* as a descriptive writer and was strongly tempted by it. However, when Mr. Watson readily agreed to the transfer, I had no hesitation in sticking to *The Daily Telegraph*.

My first reportorial job was another hint of destiny, and was also slightly unfortunate. Air exercises, the most realistic since the end of World War I, had been planned, and for the first time Press observers were to be allowed to fly with the bombing formations. At that time it was still considered a daring and dangerous thing to fly with the R.A.F., even on peace-time manœuvres. Consequently, any feelings of envy among my colleagues were modified by the general conviction that I would not return alive.

I accepted the job eagerly as a chance to show what I could do and found myself assigned to an Auxiliary Air Force squadron, flying old-fashioned Fairey Fawn biplane bombers and stationed at Waddington, in Lincolnshire. I had bought a Morris two seater, and as I motored up to Waddington in it I noticed with some misgivings that the wind was blowing at gale force. No sooner had I arrived than I was rushed into a sidcot flying suit, a bugle was sounded and I was swept out onto the tarmac with a mass of men all of whom acted as if their trousers were on fire.

The aircraft were lined up with screws thrashing. Nobody was quite sure where I was to go. Somebody shouted that he had a vacant place, and, apprehensively dodging the flashing screw, I somehow scrambled in. Then I noticed a mechanic dashing madly out of the hangar waving an object at me and shouting. He pushed something into the cockpit. I bawled: "What's that?"

"Parachute," he yelled.

"What the hell do I do with it?" I screamed agitatedly.

"Shove it on, jump out, count five, then pull the handle."

This, I claim, is the shortest parachute training course on record. All this realistic haste turned out to be a theatrical misfire. At that moment the commanding officer appeared on the scene, made a negative gesture, the engines stopped and we all sheepishly climbed out. It had been decided that, as the wind was too tempestuous, these old machines would not be able to reach their objective—North Weald

aerodrome. The operation was postponed until the following day.

The delay was fatal. That evening the "boys," who were all spare-time volunteers, their occupations ranging from farming to clerking, insisted that I should be their guest in Nottingham. They said that, as they had to fly next day, it was only a modest celebration. That I must describe as a matter of opinion.

We took off next morning in extremely bumpy weather and closed to a tight formation. My pilot, who normally drove a tractor, was nevertheless a skilled flier. Formation flying is a curious experience. You get a definite impression of three-dimensional movement, not apparent when watching aircraft from the ground. I noticed that the other aircraft were floating up and down like fish in a tank. From the repeated "lift" sensations I deduced that we were doing the same thing. It was an open cockpit and an oil-tainted hurricane beat upon me. I grew thoughtful and less talkative on the inter-communication system. My ruddy complexion became tinged with yellow. I felt ill; I was ill.

Air sickness is twice as bad as sea-sickness and some people never get over it. I am one of them. Although on five flights out of six I may feel all right nowadays, on the sixth I am still liable to succumb.

On this occasion I felt infinitely worse than at any time during my liver abscess trouble. I curled up in the bottom of the cockpit preparing to die; then I contemplated making a parachute drop to get out of the confounded thing. Common sense kept me back; duty forced me to look biliously round from time to time. I saw our squadron leader fire Very lights to indicate that we were bombing. Shortly afterwards a squadron of Siskin fighters, with red and white, check patterned wings, loomed high upon our tails, a thrilling sight. They overtook us and dived out of the sun. Feeling uncommonly heroic, I used a camera gun on these attackers, and at least had some pictures to show.

After five hours of nausea I was myself vomitted on to the airfield at Waddington, and while all the pilots and observers went in to dinner I had to sit down and write my story with as much enthusiasm as a dying man composing his last

testament. I phoned it immediately. Though it was published, other newspapers whose flights had gone off to schedule had beaten me by a day, and left me nothing to write about. In all the circumstances it was not a particularly good story or an auspicious start for my London reporting career.

The worst trials of reporting are nerve-racking uncertainty and sealed lips. Every day's work is a little like an examination which may plough you with unexpected or impossible questions. Some eminent people, and some less eminent, are uniformly courteous and helpful to reporters. Others, I regret to say, are not. In the years that followed I went through the gamut from fires to murders, from gossip paragraphs to lifeboat disasters. Nothing equalled the joy of a good story well done; nothing the agony of being beaten by a competitor.

I was happy in my private life. When on holiday in Belgium I visited Bruges. I had thought that belfries were exclusively inhabited by bats, but when I had climbed to the top of Bruges Belfry I found it occupied by two fair-haired English youths, who introduced themselves as Owen and Charles Rowley. They were friendly, active, talkative. Charles effervesced perpetually with good spirits and lively wit. Owen was slightly more serious, interested in books and pictures, addicted to arty dress. He contradicted all this with an eager alertness and a quick, practical intelligence. We soon discovered that we were both newspaper men, but he had a still greater surprise when he mentioned that he was publicity manager of the *Daily Express*. He was twenty-five and, though tall, looked slight and boyish.

He was a good publicity man, who believed in truth in advertising. On the journey back to Heyst, where we all happened to be staying, he produced a picture of a laughing blonde, seated in a miniature car. He said her intelligence matched her beauty, vivacity, and good nature. It was his sister, Hilda. I married her.

I come, unwillingly, to the episode of the beard. Since this is as faithful an autobiography as the law of libel and good taste will allow, let the story be told,

I had been impressed by the calculations of magazine writers that if a man could devote all the time he spent in shaving to other purposes he could learn several languages, write so many books, and acquire numerous rare accomplishments. One day my wife gave me the joyful news that we were to have a baby. Only prospective fathers can appreciate the blend of fear and elation in my mind. I felt that I, too, must make some sacrifice. I thought I would grow a beard, not fully aware at the time of the violent passion and prejudice aroused in other men's breasts by the process.

Whiskers are the most difficult crop to grow in the British Isles. Other men regard them as a personal insult and do not hesitate to show their aversion. Hairdressers do not know how to trim them and usually give them a list to port or starboard. Angry women can seize a beard and make the wearer look acutely ridiculous.

My decision was reinforced by the chance that my wife and I, holidaying at Alfriston, had Professor Joad, with a group of satellite students, as fellow guests at the house where we stayed. If Joad can do it, thought I, so can I.

Then the trouble started. Men who would not dream of shaving their heads or their eyebrows but slavishly scraped their faces every day, derided and pleaded with me to take it off. They appealed to my vanity, my sense of fair play, and my sense of decency. All this persecution was vain and merely made me more obstinately hirsute every day. I soon had to admit to myself, however, that the ingenious calculations of time saved were entirely wrong. I wasted hours every day explaining why I had grown a beard—giving every reason but the true one. Then there was the problem of keeping it tidy, which meant visiting the hairdresser at least once a week and/or shaving the cheeks to cultivate a Van Dyck effect.

I began to get extremely tired of the ceaseless explanations, the endless chatter about my harmless little beard. Eventually when I was put into war correspondent's uniform in 1942 I thought that at last I had the excuse I had been wanting for ten years. I rang up the War Office and asked hopefully whether it would be necessary to shave off the beard. Public

Relations did not know, and held conference on the subject. Then they rang me up and, to my great disappointment, told me that, as a war correspondent, I would still be permitted to go bearded like the pard.

I made a great resolve, and stole furtively to a Fleet Street barber. When, with a few deft strokes, he had removed my whiskers, I felt ten years younger. Now everybody I met was regretful, but the phase soon passed. I suppose the uniform satisfied my exhibitionism.

The birth of our first son, Nigel, had the effect of renewing our enthusiasm for the cause of peace. It was unthinkable, madly criminal that a living creature brought into the world with such pain and trouble should be exposed to the risks of war. We joined the League of Nations Union; I hawked the Peace Petition about, growing hot and angry when cynics refused to sign. A second son, Julian, arrived, reinforcing our peaceful desires. It did not matter that millions of parents before had had millions of babies before. Ours were different, infinitely more precious.

At the office, anxious for a more settled life, I resignedly accepted a job known as "summary writer," in the sub-editor's room. Its previous holder had been Jack Sewell, who described it as exactly like the game of croquet in *Alice in Wonderland* played with flamingoes and hedgehogs. The idea was to summarise the news, in three- or four-line paragraphs, and put the page number after each item. The summarising was fairly simple. It was done from proofs, and the good reporter or sub-editor always put the story in the first few lines, thus saving me an infinitude of trouble.

The real difficulty was the paging, which had to be done while the pages were actually being made-up in columns on the stone. Sub-editors, assembling galleys of type into a page, cutting and cursing against the clock, would suddenly move an item from page six to page eight, or from page ten to page twelve. The summary-writer danced about, getting in everybody's way in a frantic struggle to get his pages right. The bane of my life was "Royal Naval Appointments," a small item in microscopic type, the disposal of which was left to one of the printers. He wedged this where it would fit.



Night after night, when I approached him with my ever-recurring inquiry for the third or fourth time, he would reply, with a monotonous economy of language: "The flippin' Navy is on page so-and-so." It was full compensation when the Royal Navy rescued me from Leros.

This was a night job, which kept me at the office until one o'clock every morning. We lived at Holland Park and I travelled home on the No. 9 bus with fellow journalists. A frequent companion was Charles Morgan, then dramatic critic of *The Times*, who lived at Notting Hill. He revealed himself, in conversation, as the most painstaking and conscientious of craftsmen. Sometimes he would struggle for weeks with a passage in one of his books, writing and re-writing. He was the living embodiment of the truth that genius is one part inspiration and ninety-nine perspiration.

Morgan also gave me financial tips, though, alas, I had no money to follow them up. Then one night he yawned capaciously and said: "This journey's infernally tedious." I took this as a poor compliment to my conversation. Producing a copy of his book *The Fountain* from under my arm, I retorted: "It was all right for me till I started reading *The Fountain*." He was highly amused, fondled the book lovingly, and then, at my request, autographed it, adding the words "On a bus, 1 a.m."

It was upside-down, in type on the stone, that I read most of the headlines of the hysterical period of Hitler's rise. The headings looked no less ominous the right way up in the following morning's paper. Soon the whole world was to be upside-down, and inside me I knew it, yet clung tenaciously to hope and applauded the efforts of Mr. Chamberlain for peace.

Meanwhile, despite the feeling of kinship with the Gadarene swine, personal ambition still smouldered, and was fanned by the report of the Government's Television Committee which recommended, in 1934, that the B.B.C. should start a high-definition service. It not merely revived my interest but now roused a real enthusiasm for radio. As I had been writing occasionally for the *New York Times* on the subject, I had kept my contacts with the B.B.C., and

had also written gossip paragraphs and special stories on the subject for *The Daily Telegraph*.

I aspired to be Fleet Street's first television correspondent, and was fortunate in enlisting the support of dynamic Oscar Pulvermacher, who, after being acting editor of the *Daily Mail*, had joined *The Daily Telegraph* as assistant editor. Eventually *The Daily Telegraph*, once again pioneering, agreed to reappoint me as radio correspondent, combining it with the duties of television correspondent. Such was Mr. Pulvermacher's impetuous and infectious enthusiasm that on the day of my appointment he summoned me and said: "We want a television set in the office tomorrow. Not next day or the day after. Tomorrow."

For a moment I was flabbergasted. "But there aren't any," I stammered, then added as bright afterthought: "And if there were there's no transmission."

Mr. Pulvermacher was not in the least nonplussed. "If you can't get a high-definition set, get a low-definition one." His drive and energy were prodigious, but then he had been trained in the Northcliffe school.

The B.B.C. were at that time still transmitting on the old Baird thirty-line system. I clutched eagerly at the possibility of salvation, and immediately contacted the enterprising chief engineer of the Baird Company, A. G. D. West. He responded magnificently. There *was* a set in the office next day. It was one of the old mirror drum type. Though it reminded me of those fruit machines which whirr round and are eminently satisfactory only when you get the combination right, it did at any rate give recognisable images within its somewhat crude limitations.

So I was able to start—perhaps a little prematurely—as the first television critic in the world, on the crest of the first wave of novelty and interest, and with almost nothing to criticise. Unfortunately, television did not fulfil its first fine promise. The B.B.C. were handicapped at the start of the new high-definition service by having to experiment in the overcrowded confines of Alexandra Palace with the two rival systems of Baird and Marconi-E.M.I. Sets were expensive and difficult to produce. The public held back in the belief that something better and cheaper would soon come along.

Mr. Gerald Cock, the Television Director, had insufficient money at his disposal.

Most people, seeing the screen for the first time, objected that it was too small, comparing it mentally to the monstrous cinema screen with its gargantuan images. Few had more adaptable as that of octogenarian Bernard Shaw who visited Alexandra Palace to see the televising of his *Arms and the Man*. He, too, first remarked on the smallness of the screen when I asked him what he thought of it. I added, in the next sentence: "But you get used to that." The fact is, of course, that everything depends on the distance of the eye from the screen and the definition of the picture. Small newspaper pictures in their normal setting look satisfactory, but if they filled a page six feet square would be better. Probably the ideal size of screen for the average home will turn out eventually to be about twenty inches by sixteen inches compared with the present average of ten by eight.

I am not a celebrity hunter, and yet I angled for a meeting with my idol Shaw. When Gerald Cock, taking the frail old man round the studios, paused to introduce him, I felt humble and insignificant.

Shaw was at the last oracular stage of his career, but he became, in his own words, an "old dotard." Every word he said was regarded as a priceless pearl of wisdom or a flash of wit. I had invited him by telephone to come to see *Arms and the Man* on a set installed in the office and I was immensely rather pleased with myself for my enterprise. He politely declined the invitation, explaining that he was going to the B.B.C. My colleague George Bishop, literary editor of *The Daily Telegraph* and also an authority on the theatre, was a friend of Shaw, and I had consulted George about the matter.

Somehow Shaw had got the idea that it was George Bishop who had asked him to see television. When I thought it necessary to make it plain that it was in fact I who made the suggestion, Shaw twitted me about it. His remarks were entirely unimportant, but, hypnotised by their greatness, I took them away, treasured them and repeated them.

Shaw was not all that difficult to interview till old age began to sap his vitality. He was on the B.B.C.'s Pronunciation Committee for some years, though how an Irishman could be expected to pronounce English or give any advice on the subject, I cannot conceive. Having wheedled his telephone number out of Blanche Patch, his secretary—after several calls at Whitehall Court—I rang him up from time to time to get a few “quotes” on the pronunciation question. So long as I asked him as Marsland Gander he would talk, but if I said it was *The Daily Telegraph* he would either close down or name a fee.

After that one visit to Alexandra Palace, Shaw did not seem to take any more interest in television. He has no set and did not trouble to go a short distance in his Hertford village to see a television version of *Pygmalion*. However, persuaded by his playwright friend Denis Johnston, then running B.B.C. television programmes, he did consent to let the television camera men take a short film of him on his ninetieth birthday.

Television was contending not merely with public apathy but also with the mounting threat of war. It seems unbelievable now that anyone could have doubted Nazi intentions. In the spring of 1938 my wife and I planned to take our Rover car to the Continent and motor to Austria. When the A.A. sent me a map of the German autobahnen the military purpose of the German system of costly motor-roads was obvious at a glance. One road, for example, was interrupted abruptly at the Polish Corridor and continued on the other side of the Corridor, in East Prussia!

Our trip produced even more striking evidence of the Nazis' plan. Germany was an armed camp, manœuvres were going on everywhere, and the Bavarian Alps, on the borders of Austria, were swarming with troops. When we returned to London I was convinced that war was coming soon, and prayed that we might have time for preparation. Only recently, with the spate of post-war revelations, has the public become fully aware of our unpreparedness at Munich time. Shortly after Munich I remember visiting, on a television story, a typical R.A.F. fighter aerodrome near London. The R.A.F. had there one Hurricane squadron and

two squadrons of obsolescent biplane Gladiators. These had, however, been supplemented with cartloads of brickbats and rubble with which to fill up the bomb-holes.

It does not require much imagination to think what would have happened if Hitler had flung the full weight of the Luftwaffe against London in 1938.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WAR CORRESPONDENT

WAR CAME, and I arrive at a period I have already touched upon in two other books—*Atlantic Battle* and *Long Road to Leros*. Some recapitulation is necessary and is justified by more than mere demands of narrative continuity. General Eisenhower's recent revelations about his arguments with Mr. Churchill over the Dodecanese Islands have again spotlighted a discreditable war episode of which I saw a great deal—namely the Leros surrender. Moreover, it is now possible for me to write about it without censorship, as the sole representative of the world Press who had the doubtful privilege of seeing the German invasion there.

Though Eisenhower's may be the bird's-eye and mine the worm's-eye view, I can at least tell how a clash of opinion at high level affects the fortunes of the private soldier and the slightly more privileged war correspondent. When Italy surrendered, the islands, in an important strategical position, appeared to be there for the taking, and General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, commanding in the Middle East, sent small detachments to seize them. Then Hitler struck back hard. Eisenhower remarks that the Italian garrisons had no stomach for fighting against anyone. That is partially true, but I can assert emphatically that the Italian gunners in Leros, both those manning anti-aircraft and the shore batteries, stuck bravely to their guns.

While an inspired whisper was being spread in Cairo and Alexandria that "the Prime Minister says we must hold Leros to the last," it now emerges that Eisenhower was deciding that no troops could be diverted from Italy to support the islands. While a trickle of reinforcements was being sent precariously through Turkish territorial waters to Leros, while war correspondents were being given "pep"

talks about the marvellous defensive possibilities of the rocky island, General Eisenhower was calling a conference in Tunisia at which to announce his irrevocable decision. He remarks that it was the "simplest and most unargumentative" of any similar conference he attended.

It is astonishing that attempts to reinforce Leros should have been going on at the same time. Surely a more reasonable move would have been evacuation. Reading all this, although one knows that both "Ike" and Mr. Churchill acted from the highest motives, anybody who took part in the Leros affair must inevitably have a sense of betrayal. I assure General Eisenhower that if some of my companions from Leros had been wafted on a magic carpet to his conference, there would have been plenty of argument.

One thing is far from clear in Eisenhower's narrative, namely how, without obtaining the use of Turkish airfields, he could possibly have provided the necessary air cover for Leros. As stated in my despatches and book, lack of air support was the chief cause of our losing Leros so quickly. Cyprus, 250 miles away, was too distant to be used as a fighter base.

In all the circumstances, it is impossible to understand why our naval strength was wasted and 3,000 British troops were sacrificed in this futile attempt to hold an untenable position. The contention at G.H.Q. in Cairo that because of its rocky features and strongly built defences there was a sporting chance of holding Leros ignored all previous lessons of air power.

The naval losses were the worst aspect of the Dodecanese muddle. At least five destroyers were lost and three others severely damaged. Four cruisers were also heavily damaged. The Royal Navy, though responding loyally to duty, was bitter at the needless creation of another "Tobruk" and a new "bomb alley." It seemed that at a time when we were winning everywhere else we had to bend backwards to organise a defeat.

Before filling the blanks and clearing up some mysteries in my published Leros story, it is not irrelevant to explain a few of the difficulties of writing books in wartime. These troubles may account for any inadequacies and errors. My

two war-books attempted to describe, censorship allowing, first experiences as a war correspondent, both in civilian clothes and uniform. Story-hunting took me to Dover, at the time of threatened invasion in 1940; to mid-Atlantic in a destroyer chasing U-boats, in 1942; to Ireland, Iceland, Africa, India, Burma and the Middle East.

*Atlantic Battle*, describing ten days in the destroyer *Vanquisher* when she was on Atlantic escort duty, was written at nights in the office while the London Blitz provided "noises off." The other book, recounting experiences up to my escape from Leros, was written mostly in hotel bedrooms and Press camps while careering about the world on other assignments. I finished it, incidentally, on daily journeys in the train between Angmering and London Bridge.

I usually typed about ten pages at a time, steered this through the local censor, then sent it in a registered packet to my wife. In England it then had to go for final approval to the Ministry of Information. Another serious problem was the regulation which prohibited the taking of letters, documents or literature of any kind from one country to another. This meant endless trouble with Customs officials. Sometimes I was able to get the military censor to seal up my notebooks and uncompleted manuscript and take this packet through the Customs with a minimum of delay. At other times my notebooks, essential to the expectant author, nearly had me shot at dawn.

Such an incident occurred in Cyprus at the beginning of my long-sustained attempt to reach the Dodecanese Islands in October and November, 1943. After disappointments, manoeuvrings and machinations which would be tedious to retail I had persuaded the Royal Navy to help me get to Leros. They flew me, to the annoyance of some rivals, from Alexandria to Haifa in a Blackburn Roc fighter; then on from Haifa to Nicosia, Cyprus, in a Blenheim bomber.

On arrival in Cyprus I went to Famagusta to try my blandishments on the naval officer in charge, but in the docks there my immediate purpose was changed by running into some South African Air Force types who had just been evacuated from Kos. The news trail often twists and turns.



Now, suddenly, I was intent on interviewing these men and cabling a story of the strange little campaign in Kos, where, after taking the island without opposition, we were now having a miniature Dunkirk.

They were in good heart, unperturbed by their narrow escape from "the bag." I produced my notebook and was writing feverishly when up came a security officer, who stared suspiciously at the green war correspondent tabs. He objected strongly to my taking notes. However ineffectively this campaign was being conducted, with its "penny packets" of men and materials, its heavy destroyer losses, and its series of evacuations—the security boys were undoubtedly "on their toes."

Disgruntled, and possibly haughty, I put my notebook away and relied on memory. Whether events that followed had any connection with this incident, I do not know, but the presumptive evidence is strong. A day or two later I went for the week-end with Norman Smart, of the *Daily Express*, to a small seaside place. As we were leaving I noticed, with dismay, that my notebook was missing. I hunted everywhere, but could not find it.

"Never mind," I said to Norman. "There was nothing in it that could possibly matter, and, in any case, nobody could read my shorthand."

Nevertheless, it looked suspiciously as though somebody had lifted it out of my pocket, and I was worried.

I was explaining all about it to Byford-Jones, the Public Relations wallah in Nicosia, when his telephone rang. He answered it and looked anxious: "You're for it," he said kindly. "The G2<sup>1</sup> wants to see you. They've found your notebook."

The G2 looked grave and gloomy when I faced him, and my heart was sunk without trace. I admitted ownership and prepared for the firing party.

"Mr. Marsland Gander," intoned the G2, "this notebook contains highly secret information. You have the words Force 292. How do you account for it?"

I felt exactly like one of Will Hay's scholars confronting the headmaster, and I stared at him like a gibbering idiot.

<sup>1</sup> G2 means General Staff Officer, Grade Two.

Blank.

I said: "What *does* it mean? You tell me, I haven't the faintest recollection."

It was the Colonel's turn to stare, or rather glare. Then I said that if he would give me the chance of taking it away and attempting to read the notes which preceded and followed this cryptic entry I would try to translate it. My notebook contained a hotch-potch of information and casual jottings—ranging from impressions of the surrender of the Italian Fleet at Alexandria to a list which read: "1500 B.C. Conquered by Thotmes II of Egypt; 1000 B.C. Phoenician Settlements; 525 B.C. Taken by Persians under Cambyzes; 480 B.C. Cyprus supplied 150 ships to Xerxes; 294 B.C. Ruled by Ptolemy; 58 B.C. Taken by Rome, administered by Cicero; presented by Julius Caesar to Ptolemy of Egypt and by Anthony to Cleopatra; 31 B.C. Retaken by Rome under Augustus; 1191. Taken by Richard Cœur de Lion."

I was tempted to ask the Colonel whether he thought this would be valuable information to the enemy but discreetly kept quiet. Another entry, descriptive of a certain officer, read "dark, slightly bald, restless, eager, randy." On the whole I was not anxious to have my notebook hawked around.

However, I fancy that the Colonel's agents must have been combing the notebook fairly thoroughly, for his fierce expression suddenly changed, a flicker of a smile passed across his face and he handed it back to me, with a caution. I thanked him profusely. Later, after much puzzlement, I recalled the origin of the mysterious numbers 292. When in Haifa I had been trying hard to pick up information about the Dodecanese campaign and my wanderings took me to a local British headquarters. The intelligence officer there was closer than an oyster: "Sorry, old boy," he said. "Strict orders to say nothing. You'll have to go back to Cairo to G.H.Q. and ask for Major Blank, Force 292. Room G 21."

To this day I do not know precisely what those three figures signified, but I have an idea that it was the code

number of the force which had been collected for the Dodecanese campaign.

We war correspondents, though frequently in the complete confidence of Army commanders, were also often groping blindly in the dark at lower levels. For example, when I set out for Leros as the potential representative of the world Press in the event of the island being invaded, I had no idea how Army Public Relations in Cairo proposed to transport me there. Then when I wrote *Long Road to Leros* censorship prevented me from explaining how the journey was, in fact, accomplished.

The situation was this. At the time of the Italian surrender, most of the Dodecanese Islands, with the notable exception of Rhodes, were occupied by token forces, who were greeted with open arms by the war-weary Italian garrisons. Then Hitler counter-attacked with such success that when I eventually left Alexandria in a Sunderland flying-boat only Castelrosso, Leros and Samos were left in our hands. We reached Castelrosso, which is remote from the other islands, only 160 miles from Cyprus, and about half a mile from the Turkish mainland. Its special position in the group, within fighter range of Cyprus, made it much less exposed to German attentions. In contrast, Leros was wedged precariously among the German-held islands and completely dominated by the Luftwaffe.

The Royal Navy, at heavy cost, ruled the dangerous island seas at night, but by day the Luftwaffe were almost undisputed masters. Both the sea and the air routes to Leros from Castelrosso looked, in anticipation, equally perilous. I still had no definite clue as to how we were to reach Leros when I found myself with a party of nine officers, bound for Samos and Leros, assembled on the quay at Castelrosso in capable naval hands.

We embarked in a motor-driven caique which, to my surprise, made straight for Turkish territorial waters. As we moved into a Turkish cove I noticed three jagged chunks of rock rising out of the water. At least, I thought they were chunks of rock, but, when we drew nearer, it became apparent that they were three small vessels, so cunningly disguised with coloured netting as to be indistinguishable, at a distance,

from the coastline. Each was a masterpiece of camouflage art. The colouring was perfect and the artist had evidently carefully studied the Turkish shores to produce this realistic effect. Spars lifting the netting away from the ship's superstructure gave a rugged appearance and concealed the contours beneath.

Sad to say, all this ingenuity was wasted, for the Germans had decided to respect Turkish territorial waters and not to interfere with our ships using them. In fact, there is strong presumptive evidence that they were using Turkish waters themselves for the counter-invasion of the Dodecanese Islands. Thus the odd situation existed that the British retired to neutral safety by day while the Germans did the same thing at night.

The extent to which the "neutral" Turks were countenancing our use of their havens was soon obvious. A small boat with a Turkish superintendent of police on board put out and rowed towards us. We hove-to and he came aboard, shaking hands cordially with the bearded naval lieutenant in charge. Three passengers were now embarked in each of the three craft. The luckiest, we thought, were those assigned to a smart and speedy-looking m.t.b. The Public Relations officer Crichton, the photographer Wood, and I parted the camouflage curtains to board a small motor minesweeper, tightly packed with about fifty troops, who were Leros reinforcements. They were mostly Buffs, and, had they known it, were bound by the most direct route for German prison camps.

The minesweeper captain, a brave and hospitable R.N.V.R. officer named Brawel, welcomed us cordially on board. He revealed that his orders were to creep by night along the Turkish coast, hugging it as closely as possible, and to lie up camouflaged during the day in any convenient Turkish creek. The coast is heavily indented and offered many possible hiding-places from German eagles.

We all set off at dusk, in line ahead, our minesweeper leading. The first casualty was the smart m.t.b., which, signalling that she had engine trouble, returned to Castellorosso. We negotiated the dangerous channels between the German-held islands of Rhodes and Simi and the mainland.

Then, in the small hours of the following morning, the minesweepers obeyed orders by separating and preparing lie-up disguised as rocks. Our vessel crept into a Turkish creek, only to run aground on a narrow spit of land that would have trapped any mariner not familiar with the coast.

All next day Turkish fishermen and two or three uniform types, who might have been coastguards, swarmed on board gesticulating and chattering. None of us could understand a word of Turkish, and as all efforts with the engine reverse and a kedge failed to pull us off, we grew more and more depressed. Under the meshed camouflage netting I felt remarkably like flies in a trap. I was strongly inclined to go ashore to make my way somehow to Ankara where many of my journalistic colleagues were working in civilian clothes. However, I was restrained by Crichton, who insisted that if I landed in uniform I would be immediately interned for the duration.

We could see the humped mass of Kos, perhaps ten miles away, half-concealed by one arm of the bay. Every night and then a high-flying German aircraft would pass over, on its way to or from Kos, and we never doubted for an instant that annihilation was imminent. Then that night the other minesweeper, which had been carrying out a perilous search for us from creek to creek, gallantly came back and towed us off. As we found out later, the risk was purely navigational, but none of us knew this at the time.

All was excitement and optimism on board when we started off again, but, as I have already related in *Long Road to Leros*, we had the misfortune to run aground once more. Censorship did not, however, permit me to say that this second grounding occurred when we were trying to navigate the three-miles wide Kos strait between the German-held island and neutral Turkey.

A Turkish sentry, becoming suddenly alert to strange happenings on his doorstep, directed a burst of machine-gun fire at our shadowy ship. He seemed to be firing somewhat high and possibly it was merely a warning. Some bullets ricocheted off the bridge and red tracer streamed overhead. There was a brief silence, then another burst. Our troops crouched on the port side behind any available cover and

there were no casualties. Then the Germans, in Kos, joined in the firework display with Very lights.

When dawn broke we were lying firmly wedged and hideously exposed, watched suspiciously from both sides of the narrow channel, but there was no further firing. In fact, when I landed with the first officer to parley in sign language with the nearest Turkish commandant, the sentry who had fired was shamefaced and apologetic. He used little bits of wood to demonstrate the position of our ship and said: "Deutsch tat-tat-tat. English, no." Figs and coffee were produced to assuage our wrath.

It was obvious that the Turks had been instructed to show favouritism to the British. When the commandant arrived he treated us with almost exaggerated courtesy, but to us there seemed no time to lose in formalities. The Germans had sent over an Arado seaplane to have a look, and at any moment we expected to be blown sky-high. I remembered that when interviewing, in Cyprus, British soldiers who had escaped from Kos they had spoken of the help given them by a "British consul."

On mentioning the word "consul" to the Turkish commandant his unshaven bulldog face brightened. He took me to an ancient telephone, jabbered into it for a while and then handed the instrument to me. It was the most agreeable shock in a week of shocks when, standing in that primitive stone building on a lonely alien shore, I heard a cultured English voice speaking to me.

The speaker was the bogus consul, being in fact a British naval officer, who, with the connivance of the Turks, was stationed at the small township of Bodrun. His duties were, apparently, to act as *deus ex machina* in this weird and theatrical little campaign.

Shortly afterwards he appeared in our midst with trap-door abruptness, accompanied by another young man in civilian clothes who turned out to be an American naval officer. It was melodramatic and highly improbable that they should arrive to help us at that precise moment, but that is just exactly what happened.

I remember that the first officer and I had returned to the stranded minesweeper and were watching with interest

Brawel's determined and polite attempts to entertain the Turkish commandant. He showed acute discomfiture when handling a knife and fork and ate some bully beef with the expressions of Charlie Chaplin tackling an old boot in *The Gold Rush*. However, the point that chiefly interested me was the commandant's obvious indifference to the threat of being bombed. A cry from a look-out brought us rushing to the deck, where we saw a small sailing caïque, propelled by an auxiliary motor, bearing down upon us, with the two naval officers on board. They were hatless and wore sports coats with flannel bags.

Their chief concern was to get us all ashore on Turkish soil, with the minimum of delay in case we were bombed. We were amazed at the way in which the Turks co-operated, the only small hitch being over the fact that the mine-sweeper was still flying the White Ensign. Eventually, while local inhabitants were rowing the troops ashore, complete with all their arms and equipment, in cockleshell boats, some Turkish fishermen took it upon themselves to run down the White Ensign and replace it with the Turkish flag.

Brawel was asking my opinion on this matter and I was remarking to him that, after all, we were on Turkish ground, when the substitution took place. The complete aloofness of the Germans to all this greatly puzzled us at the time. Kos town, about six or eight miles away, could be seen distinctly with the naked eye and German seaplanes were constantly taking off and landing. Overhead, droves of Junkers bombers, in small formations, passed in an endless procession to and from Leros. They circled wide over the Turkish mainland, ignoring its neutrality. If we had been able to use Turkish airfields for our fighters it would have saved Leros and turned the miniature campaign in our favour. The whole business was a classical, if absurd, example of war played to ever-changing M.C.C. rules.

The craggy coastline, comprising low cliffs, stretches of pebbly beach, and sparsely covered hillsides, was treeless and offered no cover. We were all herded together like sheep on some rising ground, within full view of Kos, and two or three Turkish sentries carrying obsolescent rifles were our

... of the local authorities, the language of their conversation being unspecified.

After a few hours, our two rescuers, who appeared to do exactly as they pleased, produced a fleet of motor-driven caiques to take us all off again on the next stage of our journey. They also brought a sizeable tug which began a series of conspicuous and unsuccessful efforts to refloat the minesweeper. I believe that in the end she was dragged off undamaged.

Rumours about her fate pursued us as we chugged peacefully along the coast, night drawing a curtain over the windy, sunlit day and turning the tumbling water to indigo. The mystery in our drama was fully maintained, and the next surprise was to be disembarked for the night on board the damaged Greek destroyer *Adrias*, which, lying in a winding Turkish creek, was being used as a depot ship and a last jumping-off place for Leros. The Turks observed the formality of a solitary sentry to watch the *Adrias*, but though her occupants could not land they were free to come and go, by water, to heart's content. German bombers, queuing-up for Leros, passed overhead all day and the thump of distant bombs never ceased.

Next night two British m.t.b.s came alongside the *Adrias* and we were once more embarked, this time for the final dash across the open sea. We left the protected neutral belt and after a moonlit voyage of about an hour were disembarked in Alinda Bay, Leros.

Happily we were not aware that in another neutral creek down the coast the German invasion fleet were sheltering for the night so that, when daylight came and the Luftwaffe again dominated the scene, they could swoop on Leros. I have already described how, in the small hours of the following morning, without the decent interval that any properly organised stage-play offers, the German invasion began, and how it developed with sea-landings and parachute drops.

But censorship prevented an explanation of how, precisely, Crichton and I eventually escaped at the most critical moment of a confused battle spreading over this island about



the size of Sark. We had landed on the night of November 11, and the invasion began at five o'clock next morning. Crichton and I went immediately to battle headquarters, situated in a tunnel which had been bored by the Italians through the summit of Mount Meraviglia about 700 feet above sea-level. The two exits, at either end, commanded vistas of a great part of the island. It was not only a marvellous vantage-point but also comparatively safe—if only I could have persuaded myself to stay in it. The trouble was that, with nervous zeal, I was perpetually popping out on to the hill-sides, and as the interior of the tunnel grew ever dustier and smokier I could hardly bear to stay in it for a moment. However, I doubt whether, in the whole war, any correspondent had a better or safer gallery seat at a battle.

I saw it develop with all the improbable violence and spectacular detail of a film. German parachute and landing-craft attacks were delivered, in my sight, with reckless and suicidal gallantry. It was a mad sacrifice and merciful distance hid the agony as many perished in blasts of fire. Yet, chiefly owing to the complete absence of British air support, the uncertain qualities of our new Italian allies, and the continuous daylight bombing by the flying artillery of the Luftwaffe, the enemy gradually increased his grip.

My own constant and growing anxiety was to find means of telegraphing a full-length story to London. Soldiers, I find, frequently cannot understand the single-mindedness of a correspondent. As far as he is concerned all is lost, professional honour defiled, and history cheated if he is unable to put experience on record. I do not pretend that I relished the situation physically, but it was chiefly a desire to reach the cable-head that caused me, after two days, to leave the tunnel with Crichton in what seemed a forlorn attempt to get away from Leros. We made for the emergency exit of Portolago Bay, the only anchorage that was still in British and Italian hands, sustained by the slender hope that a British destroyer would bring in much-needed reinforcements and supplies.

We waited in vain for a night at Portolago, and then next morning, in an excess of enthusiasm, I insisted on threading in broad daylight through the elastic and confused battle

few hundred words among the urgent appeals for help.

I remember that, having filed this message, I then suggested returning immediately to Portolago, because I thought there was a double danger, first that battle headquarters might be overrun, secondly that we might be cut off from Portolago. Crichton was in favour of waiting till dusk, but I over-persuaded him. It is a mystery to me how we made this second journey to Portolago unscathed. Although it was only a few miles, we must have been exposed at many points to enemy observation. It is highly probable that the Germans held their fire because Red Cross jeeps were using the one and only road that wound down through the hills. At one point, in fact, we got a lift in a Red Cross jeep.

Then, after lying on the quayside at Portolago all night, Crichton and I were taken off just before dawn in the destroyer *Echo*.

The *Echo* took a desperate risk in entering the narrow waters of this bottlenecked bay. Two other destroyers, *Hurworth* and *Eclipse*, sunk there by dive-bombers, lay on the bottom, their masts giving grim warning. *Echo's* only chance lay in getting away quickly and out of range before daylight, but though I now knew of the territorial waters trick, I thought it one that might easily be trumped.

The unlucky reinforcements, all of whom were almost immediately taken prisoners, were tobogganed ashore. Each man, weighed down heavily with kit, was manhandled by lusty sailors on to a chute to slide into the uneasy world of Leros on his posterior. Ammunition boxes rattled down after the soldiers. All this unloading was over in a matter of minutes. Crichton and I nipped on board and explained ourselves to the "No. 1." Without waiting for any other purpose whatever the *Echo* shoved off and made for the narrow entrance.

Enormous relief welled inside me as I stood on deck and felt the throbbing engines. I had had many previous and happy associations with the Royal Navy, but I think that only then did I fully realise what it meant to our island kingdom. No lesson in life has more compelling force than

one based on personal experience, with death as the penalty for a mistake.

I was not, however, entirely happy. Our departure had the appearance of running away from an extremely awkward situation. We had left the gallant garrison in a desperate, though, I thought, not absolutely hopeless plight. I could settle this matter with my conscience in only one way. I asked myself where my duty lay and the answer seemed clear. It was to tell the world about Leros. Throughout the war I found that some colleagues did not find the answer so simple. In defiance of regulations, some armed themselves and actually took part in the fighting. They thus earned the admiring applause of certain officers who could not see that it was crass folly. The position of a war correspondent with armed forces is undeniably difficult at times, but, if he wants to fight, he should become a soldier and not be an amateur playing, at whim, with two jobs.

The *Echo*, instead of bolting straight for Turkey, impudently circled the island in the growing daylight and bombarded a German landing craft. Then as an orange crescent of sun showed above the horizon, she raced at full speed for Turkish waters. We could have been caught by the dive-bombers from Kos, but we were lucky. The hazy land grew comfortingly clearer; presently we passed a jagged needle of rock. The captain, whose name was Lieut.-Commander Wyld, R.N., broadcast to the ship: "We are now in Turkish territorial waters. Thin out."

Instantly long-sustained tension relaxed and taut nerves found relief in a spontaneous cheer from all hands. Muffled men, who had only spoken in terse low voices, began to chatter eagerly, to laugh at nothing. I stayed on deck just long enough to see that we were entering a narrow creek between barren shores, then descended to the wardroom to eat the most welcome breakfast of bacon and eggs ever set before man.

The feeling of security was astounding. We were protected by—what? Just the rules of the boxing ring observed as a whim of the German High Command. We had retired to our corner to be sponged and fanned in readiness for the next round. As Crichton and I finished our luxury breakfast

and did our best to answer the numerous questions fired at us, distant booms announced that the battle of Leros was on again. The sinister chorus silenced our chatter. Yet we could do nothing to help the men fighting and suffering such a short distance away, for to venture beyond territorial waters in daylight meant certain destruction. The Germans were, in fact, observing the territorial limits with Teutonic exactitude and thoroughness. British destroyers were shadowed for hundreds of miles and could proceed with complete impunity if they kept within the three-miles safety channel. If one strayed outside by as much as half a mile she was immediately attacked.

Nevertheless our destroyers did not take needless risks by using Turkish waters in daylight. The *Echo* set sail for Cyprus and Alexandria on the following night, when, although we did not know it at the time, the Leros garrison had already surrendered.

. . . . .

The cumulative strain of the Leros episode had been demoralising. Back in Cairo, having filed my story and had the satisfaction of seeing it in every London paper, I cabled to Skelton, *The Daily Telegraph* Director of News Services, asking for leave. It was two years since I had left Gourock in the armed merchant cruiser *Alaunia* bound for Singapore. Many disappointments and setbacks had at last been offset by a piece of personal and professional luck. I felt I deserved a rest. Skelton agreed, if I would first put in a brief spell at Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers, from where the Italian campaign was being conducted.

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So at last, just before Christmas, 1943, I had the joy of returning to my loving wife and family. The journey from Algiers was not without anxieties. When I am about to complain, nowadays, of travelling difficulties, the memory of these frightful wartime trips holds my tongue. We flew from Algiers to Gibraltar, landing on the special strip that had been built out into the sea. The next stage began at night. Paul Bewsher, of the *Daily Mail*, and I lay on the

floor of a crowded and freezing Dakota. It climbed high and went hundreds of miles out into the Atlantic for safety. Although clad in fur-lined Sidcot suits we were extremely cold. No lights were allowed, and when we stumbled in the pitch darkness to the lavatory along the lurching floor we kicked recumbent bodies. Sometimes they kicked us back. As usual, I felt ill. All this lasted eight hours. Then at last a human wreck, clutching bags of oranges, bananas and other unknown fruits, slithered out of the flying coffin on to the ice of an English airfield. This sort of thing happened many times and I give this as one sample.

I was home again. Even then that was not the end of my worries. When we entered the train for London, Paul bought a newspaper. We found to our consternation that Churchill was ill in North Africa. Although the paper did not say where he was, we knew that he must have been somewhere near Algiers on his flight back from Cairo and the Teheran conference. He had, in fact, landed at Carthage when he was taken with pneumonia.

It looked as though we had walked out on a vitally important story. When, however, I went into the office to see Skelton he did not mention it. Agreeably, warmingly, it dawned upon me that I had come home as a conquering hero.

Viscount Camrose kindly invited me to one of his famous fifth-floor lunches, at which, with some misgivings, I found myself the guest of honour, urged by my host to relate my experiences during the two years since I had left London. Then came the delight of Christmas with the family. Every year abroad at Christmas the carols had brought tears to my eyes. Now they were tears of happiness.

But the festival of peace was now only a breathing space in war. I loathed the thought of going away again, yet pressed Skelton hard to be assigned to the Second Front. It was a profound disappointment when he told me, at length, that as only one correspondent could be sent to the Second Front, wherever that was to be, he must ask me to go to Italy. So again came the wrenches of farewell and I set off by a roundabout route to reach Allied Force Headquarters, now shifted from Algiers to Naples.

As I proceeded in a series of erratic hops to North Africa

d Cairo, Chesterton's rhyme drummed through my head :  
The night we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton  
er." It was tempting to parody, as I followed

*A reeling road, a rolling road that rambled round afar  
And after him the cables ran, the censor and P.R.  
A merry road, a mazy road across the board of chess  
The night we went to Napoli by way of Inverness.*

## CHAPTER NINE

### KHAKI LEPER

AS THE ponderous war-machine creaks into action, much energy is expended on what Kipling might call "sugaring about." Indeed, there is infinitely more of this strange activity than there is positive aggression against the enemy. No picture of modern war would be complete without some reference to it. The finest example which I, personally, encountered was at Taranto, on arrival there with part of the Tenth Indian Division, in March, 1944.

I was one of a small party of officers who, for various obscure reasons, had been granted priority passages from Middle East to Italy. In Cairo we were all *agitato*, as befitted people supposed to be in a hurry and on important business. We wanted to fly, but, after about a week of form-filling, pleading and intriguing, we had been advised, severally, that because of weather and a waiting-list of still higher priorities, it would be better to go by sea. Eventually we left Alexandria on March 23, in a fast trooper, with a battalion of Gurkhas and some other Indian elements, arriving, after an uneventful voyage, five days later.

Mediterranean sunshine had given place to a snowstorm. As we shivered on deck, I felt sorry for the Gurkha sentries, who looked colder than the steel of their drawn kukris. No doubt they were thinking, under their slouch hats, what a pity it was that the sahibs could not fight their incomprehensible, never-ending wars in a reasonable climate.

We amused ourselves, while waiting, by watching two typical British workmen, to whom khaki and foreign surroundings made little difference. They were munching, with slow enjoyment, the contents of two tattered newspaper packets. Then one of them began to read something on the

result, and pointed it out, with the first sign of animation, to his companion.

A colonel, who, as senior officer, had taken charge of our priority party, was at first amused by these worthy, if slovenly, characters. Then he grew suddenly irritated at the sight of their enamel mugs, hooked under the straps of their great-coats, like monstrous epaulettes. He was a great disciplinarian.

"Well, that's the limit," he said explosively.

Still, he took no action, being busily concerned with the business of disembarking our little party ahead of the troops. Speed was everything. Two officers were appointed to look after the baggage, while the rest of us filed down into the twilight of the troop decks, shoving our way through the crowds of patient Gurkhas. The composite smell of urine, ghee, human bodies, and cooking odours was overpowering, and as soon as the gangway was secured we wasted no time in rushing ashore. Our brisk colonel, who seemed to have the situation well under control, organised us with minimum delay into a truck.

Nobody bothered about papers and I began to be most impressed with the smooth celerity of our landing. My one niggling care was the thought of having abandoned my luggage. I remembered that a newspaper colleague, who had spent between £150 and £200 in equipping himself for the fray with everything from cleft sticks to a kitchen stove, had lost the whole lot on the quayside at Glasgow before he started.

We found our way to the Transit Hotel—a masterpiece of British export achievement. Though Italian in style, in shape and spiritual atmosphere it exactly resembled a Bloomsbury boarding-house. Only the furniture and the landlady were missing. Trestle beds on the bare tessellated floors of the empty rooms gave every indication of home comfort.

My particular companion was Captain Ted Ardizzone, a British war artist, who, like myself, was also under the wing of Army Public Relations. He was portly, full of bonhomie, and—despite his Italian name—English of English. His chief occupation, when not sketching or painting, was



picquet, because, I think, he liked the old-world jargon. Altogether he was a most amiable and easy-going person.

We two had lunch together, in a communal officers' mess where one bought tickets at the door. Our meal consisted of bully beef hash, apparently sewn up and fried in a piece of old flannel. We washed it all down with copious draughts of acid red wine. I noticed our colonel lunching at another table with a Greek intelligence officer who had been a member of our party. They seemed either immensely preoccupied or suddenly stand-offish, for they took little notice of us.

After lunch, I went to the British field cashier to obtain lire on my green correspondent's advance book. It always made me feel good to receive the wads of crisp, new notes. In this instance the mood was short-lived. I returned to the hotel to find a new and excited Ardizzone sitting on the trestle bed in our joint bedroom.

"You can give up all idea of catching Thursday's train for Naples," he said.

I asked what he meant and he then explained his doleful news. An R.A.M.C. corporal had visited the Transit Hotel and inquired for all the officers who had travelled in the B.I. steamer with troops from Middle East. He said that as a lascar on board had small-pox we should all have to be put in quarantine for "two or three weeks." This was a staggering blow. I was assigned to the Eighth Army to relieve our correspondent, Christopher Buckley, who was going to the Second Front (as we then persisted in calling it). He was due to leave at any moment, and the prospect was that I should be forced to chafe in a quarantine camp while the Eighth Army was "uncovered."

My first thought was that, as I had been vaccinated at the War Office just before leaving England and we had already been permitted to circulate freely in Taranto, there was a strong temptation to cut and run for it. Unfortunately, I had never been in Italy before, spoke no word of the language, had no transport, and if I started forthwith to hitch-hike, would have to abandon all my kit.

We held an impromptu protest meeting with some of our fellow travellers, noting that there were several important

absentees, including the Colonel and the Greek intelligence officer, whose intelligence had apparently been good. Somebody said that he had seen these two making for the docks in one of the ancient gharries that plied for hire carrying enormous meters. We had come to regard the Colonel as our temporary Führer and looked to him for guidance, but I recalled with some misgivings his casual remark that his responsibility towards us ended when we landed. A few more of our company straggled in ruefully. There was Captain Tony Brett, of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, who had come from Middle East to rejoin his battalion as second in command, only to find that they were on the point of embarking in the very ship we had just left. His was by no means the worst instance of being "jiggered about." The record is probably held by a naval officer who reported for duty in Colombo, Ceylon, only to find that he had, in fact, been assigned to H.M.S. *Colombo*, a shore establishment in the British Isles.

During the afternoon, the R.A.M.C. corporal returned with our death warrant and embarked us all in a springless 15 cwt. truck. It took us, all blue with cold, to a local Salisbury Plain, desolate and windswept, where little clusters of tents stood as islands in a waste of mud. We sloshed about disconsolately, a bunch of disgruntled lepers, seekly vainly for somebody who had any clues about us. Even the affable corporal seemed nonplussed. He said he had been told to bring us to this camp and had assumed that somebody had been notified and that there would be accommodation. Finally we climbed back into the truck and trundled round and round the vast camp, which seemed to sprawl to infinity in all directions, trying to find somebody to display a spark of interest. Soon we began to see red—red tabs, red tape, each other's red and angry faces.

At last, in our livid wanderings, we came across another truck which we found, with luke-warm joy, contained our baggage in charge of the faithful two—Captain Ben Skelton, a sturdy South African forerunner of his division, and a Lieutenant Hammond. Our luck had changed, for shortly afterwards we fetched up at a large quartermaster's tent where a friendly major with a husky voice and purple complexion began to attempt organising. He started to

bellow into a temperamental telephone and, once he warmed to his self-imposed task, showed admirable perseverance in the face of adversity.

As we waited, growing colder and hungrier with every passing second, we felt ever more envious of the astute Colonel who had so adroitly by-passed this morass and was now, presumably, chortling on his way, free as a bird. The husky-voiced Major bawled away at the obstinate telephone. I began to see the reason for his hoarseness. He was talking to the Transit Hotel, trying to get us some beds. I had my camp-bed, but several of the other officers had no sleeping kit.

"My man Price," howled the Major. "No, you idiot, not 'I want rice.' My man Price, price of a leg of mutton, price of a bottle of whisky. My man Price wants some beds. I said some beds, not the heads . . ." and so on, and so on. The kind Major promised us a fatigue party to erect tents, but as they did not arrive we set to work ourselves under the energetic direction of Major Freddie Keeble, of the Royal Engineers, who had been on his way to 169 Airfield Construction Group somewhere on the Adriatic coast. This was my second attempt, during the war, to help at tent erecting. The first, in the Burma jungle, was such a ghastly failure that we had to abandon the job and call in some experts. This time, with Major Keeble as the master craftsman, we made a competent team, though hampered by the darkness and the need for not betraying the camp to enemy aircraft.

We erected two sizeable tents, then returned to the quartermaster's, where, by the light of a lantern dimly burning, we ate a meal of meat and vegetable stew, sharing our two forks. Afterwards we staked out claims, preparing to sleep six in a tent. I say "preparing," for the night was so bitterly cold and there was such a shortage of blankets that most of us slept little. I had always believed Italy to be a hot country, and, in fact, so it is for five or six months of the year. That frigid first night created such a mistaken impression that eighteen months later, returning to Rome from England, I arrived with nothing to wear but thick serge battledress. After an extremely uncomfortable and sweaty

existence for twenty-four hours I unearthed some khaki drill left behind on the previous year and speedily changed into shorts and bush shirt.

The following dawn the "Lepers' Colony" awoke with morale at its lowest ebb. Three of my companions had contracted violent colds and later two of them were taken off to hospital with 'flu—lucky fellows. We surveyed with heavy, jaundiced eyes a wide, undulating plain decorated here and there with flowering orchards. A yellow sun shone palely, a few drifting snowflakes fluttered down, playthings of the keen wind. We made a Spartan toilet with canvas buckets and cold water, cadged a meagre breakfast from the quartermaster's kitchen and, thus fortified, awaited the next move with what patience we could muster.

Towards ten o'clock an R.A.M.C. major arrived, the highest ranking officer we had so far seen. He tried to soothe our savage breasts with musical promises that we should speedily be transferred to more convenient quarters. But when, with one voice, we demanded that the comedy of our pretended isolation should be ended and we all be allowed to proceed, he was adamant and said, with the usual Army buck-passing formula, that it was nothing to do with him and would have to be referred to higher levels. He added with pride, however, that he had arranged for our transfer to Transit Camp 186 near Taranto. Only slightly appeased, we clambered with our baggage into another truck and rumbled off.

Camp 186 was much nearer Taranto docks and revealed itself as a sprawling group of brick and stone buildings surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. Brett remarked grimly that it really did look like a lepers' colony and we were probably in for a life sentence. We presented our tainted bodies at the reception office and were greeted by an adjutant who concealed his dismay under a charming manner. Apparently the whole camp, containing several hundred men, had only just come out of quarantine. It seemed, therefore, that if we entered, the quarantine period would have to start all over again. Then if another ship arrived, with more suspected contacts and they were also brought to the camp, the quarantine would have to be extended again, and so on *ad infinitum*. Filled with gloom, we could picture ourselves

in the years to come, bowed and decrepit old men, barrows round the plague-ridden camp to the dismay of "Bring out your dead." We seemed to be just Counts of Monte Cristo.

It was now painfully clear that no proper organisation of quarantine existed in Taranto. The perplexed authorities of Camp 186 then had the brainwave of forming an isolation camp. Two tents, much larger than the ones we had just vacated, were erected by Italian prisoners. A boxful of tattered, paper-covered books was provided as our library. Matters had progressed far when the camp commandant, a hearty major Grenadier Guards with a stiff leg, arrived on the scene. He proved most sympathetic, though obviously greatly embarrassed by our arrival in his camp, which was on the point of being cleared. He did his utmost to show us kindness and hospitality and apologised repeatedly for any shortcomings in the arrangements. His name was Irby. We all appreciated what he did for us, and I, for one, felt ashamed to let him see how desperately anxious I was to get away. He brushed his bristling black moustache with the back of his hand and almost winced if we suggested anything was wrong.

In the end his kindness overwhelmed us and, though we were submerged in brutish melancholy from time to time, we did not have the heart to complain to our hosts. He transferred us from the tents to a separate unit in a block, which had been started by the Germans as a measure of self-protection. It had a roof, but no doors, and was divided up with wooden partitions. Dusty roughcast floors and dirty white walls, adorned with the crude drawings of previous occupants, gave the place a still more comfortless, slummy air. The main thing was that we had walls and a roof. This was counted a great improvement. Our considerate major gave us trestle beds and tables, six blankets and sundry other comforts, such as a screeching gramophone. Two of the most recent records for the gramophone were "The band played on" and Al Jolson singing "Son of a Preacher Man." These were played by various people till our sanity was threatened, then somebody hid the sound-box.

It was still bitterly cold and we had a wood-burning stove which filled the rooms with smoke. This provided occupation for some of the mechanically-minded members of the party, who, from time to time, tried to alter the flue-pipe so that the smoke went up the chimney and did not come gushing back into the room. Sometimes they were gleeful with what appeared to be temporary victory, but the malignant smoke demon always got the better of them in the end.

We were put on parole not to associate with officers and men in the main camp, and not to attempt to escape. Our meals were sent in from the distant kitchens.

Despite the efforts that were being made to ameliorate conditions, we could not believe that anybody was happy at our being there, with the possible exception of the medical officer, a conscientious little Scotsman, who believed in vaccination with all the passionate conviction of a religious zealot. He told us we should all have to be vaccinated. This, I thought, is where I score, having only recently been vaccinated, and also innoculated against tetanus and typhoid, at the War Office. Triumphantly I produced my month-old certificate, but the M.O. was not satisfied.

"Sorry," he said, "you'll have to be done again."

This filled my breast with virtuous indignation. I *have* known people who, when in a hurry to move and suddenly confronted with new regulations about vaccination and innoculation, deliberately forge certificates. Now here was I with a perfectly genuine one which was brushed aside as useless.

"But at one time," I ventured with great daring, "the medical profession used to maintain that one vaccination conferred immunity for life. Then they made it a seven-years period, then two years, then one year, and now you are making it one month. Have we got to be punctured every month in future?"

The dour M.O. said nothing as he tested the hypodermic syringe. Then he looked up suddenly and said, "R-r-roll your sleeve up."

Said I, in a last feeble attempt, "Well, it's no use, anyway, because it never takes on me."

The medico brightened as he plunged steel into quivering

flesh. "In that case," he said, "we'll do it three times at intervals of two days."

Actually he did it twice, and then both vaccinations simultaneously, my arm swelled painfully and hideous developed. I had submitted to all this in the faint hope it would secure early release. In the meantime I wrote a long memorandum to the Area Commander and attempted to telephone to the Director of Public Relations in Naples, an old friend from the Middle East, Col. H. Astley. Neither attempt was successful. The first prod, surprisingly, a call from a bland and courteous brigadier whose red tabs made a pleasing impression on my fellow prisoners. He was the Director of Medical Services in the Taranto Area. Politely but firmly he explained that there were twenty cases of small-pox in Taranto, and he had to consider the welfare of the whole Army, no exception could be made to the quarantine rule. I pointed out, politely, that exceptions already had been made and, pointing to my arm, remarked wittily that I would invoke the Sanitary Corps Act. He looked at the sebaceous swellings, and for some perverse reason, seemed overjoyed.

"Yes, that's very good," he said, "but still you can't go for the full period of three weeks."

He harped insistently on the twenty cases of small-pox among the Italian population of Taranto, adding that if it spread to the troops it might have most serious consequences. He was hinting, of course, that it might upset plans for the coming offensive - of which we knew nothing.

My telephone call to Naples had curious results. There was a bad line, and, not getting through to Astley, I sent a message. A few days later Christopher Buckley, who was champing at the bit in the Press camp at Sessa Aurunca on Highway Six, received a message which read: "Gander with small-pox hospitalised Taranto." Buckley, in a dilemma, not realising that the Normandy campaign was many months off, decided to go at once.

Meanwhile, at Lepers' Camp, our worst fears were confirmed on the last day of March, when Major Irby produced a written order confirming that we were to be kept there until April 13. In vain we argued that we occupied

inflexibly determined.

So we resigned ourselves to make the best use we could of our enforced idleness. I continued work on *Long Road to Leros*. But the luckiest among us were probably our artists. We had another, besides Ardizzone. He was a complete contrast in physique, being extremely tall and slim, with a large aquiline nose and lank hair dusted with grey. His kindly, sensitive nature made him extremely popular with everybody. He was a Pole named Czapski who had been interned for many months by the Russians, and so to be put inside for a few weeks by the more indulgent British did not worry him.

He proposed, facetiously, to do a great mural on the lines of the Last Supper depicting the whole party sitting round a table drinking the toast of "Absent Friends" in honour of the Colonel, the Greek and those who had been taken off with influenza. Actually, he modified this project and contented himself with drawing portraits of several of his fellow-prisoners.

We settled into some sort of lazy, irregular routine. I wonder why officers, when they live together as we did, are invariably untidier and less disciplined than other ranks? Perhaps they become too dependent upon batmen. We used to straggle into breakfast in various stages of undress, at eightish, and listen to the radio news on a set provided by the C.O. After a breakfast of half-cold congealed bacon, messy potatoes, fried bread, and luke-warm Army tea, we then tackled the great problem of washing in tin bowls.

Some enterprising person set the fashion of bathing in the bowl, with stork-like gymnastics. The puzzle was to keep one's feet clean, for the floor was filthy. This washing under difficulties fascinated Ardizzone, who drew many sketches of the naked performers. Our two artists were, I believe, the only ones who thoroughly enjoyed themselves during the internment. But they hated people hanging over their shoulders and saying: "Is that supposed to be me?" Artists, more than any other people, suffer from human curiosity. I, later, saw the worst examples of this in Rome—



probably because in Rome there are more artists and more people with nothing to do than in any other European city. It is common to see an immense milling crowd and imagine that a riot has started, only to find that it is merely an artist trying, with mediocre talent, to depict the Spanish Steps or San Pietro.

Many of us became positively domesticated, made our own beds and even, once a week, aired the blankets. Tubby Skelton caused a sensation by starting to wash some clothes and then actually producing an iron.

Gradually our confinement grew less rigorous. We were allowed out for walks, providing we kept away from the local inhabitants. So, after the morning domestic chores and a lunch consisting of cold bully beef or sardines on toast, we often set out to explore the flat countryside, wandering through hop-gardens and vineyards, skirting fields of rye and orchards with their lovely Persian carpets of spring flowers.

We looked in vain for the track of armies. Not a single farmhouse was destroyed or damaged, and the locals greeted us pleasantly with "*Buon giorno*." There was no enmity between the British Tommies and the Italian peasants. Perhaps there never had been. I saw one Tommy nursing three grubby infants simultaneously in the doorway of a primitive cottage. But there was a joyless air everywhere, and much evidence of grinding poverty.

One day we walked to the little village of San Georgio, a cluster of flat-roofed houses that had once been gay with coloured distemper but were now a uniform grey. Swarthy, slatternly women with thick ankles and hairy legs coped with swarms of children, some of whom were being publicly deloused. Empty hogsheads on the pavements, garbage in the gutters, and an ugly concrete castle made up a picture of neglect, dissipation and decayed feudalism. First impressions are often superficial and misleading. I record these—subsequently overlaid by the lovely visions of Rome, Siena and Florence—as a glimpse of Italian rural poverty.

Sometimes we bathed nude in the Gulf of Taranto. Soldiers, for some reason, always think that foreigners have no standards of decency. British and American soldiers constantly bathed naked, in the most public places. But if

Italians came to England and went in the sea at Brighton naked I can imagine the outcry.

One day we strolled as far as Taranto Docks and we came across a careless pile of huge naval gun barrels—a striking monument to the childishness of man. These monstrous funnels—twenty, thirty, forty feet long—were lying like a heap of broken, forgotten toys. We could imagine with what pride they were cast in the hey-day of Mussolini's dream empire.

In the evenings cards were our chief amusement. Picquet was popular, but, owing to the expertness of Freddie Keeble, liable to be expensive. We also played "lie" cards, an adaptation of "lying" poker dice. It went on interminably, night after night, and as the wine supplied by our kind C.O. flowed freely the game grew more and more uproarious, even operatic. How silly it all sounds now, how natural and how funny at the time.

"D'you know, 'strordinary thing, I've got three aces, a king an' a ten," one of us would lie—a witty sally good enough to bring the house down. Then, from time to time, we'd be driven out by the reeking smoke into the cool night air to stare at the stars shining immutably on our follies. So this was the war in Italy, we thought.

As the day of release came near there were alarming rumours that another lot of suspects was to be dumped on us, thus extending our quarantine. But it was all right. On April 12 we were declared clean, and free to go. Public Relations sent a staff car from Naples for Ardizzone and me. We had begun our journey from Cairo, with a "Two Priority," on March 21, and finally got mobile in Italy on April 14—twenty-three days of slow-motion travel. One thing seems clear, however. A more effective way of avoiding small-pox than vaccination is to have the crown and two stars of a colonel on your shoulders.

## CHAPTER TEN

### ITALIAN TOURIST

THE JOURNEY from Taranto to Naples was mainly through a convalescent countryside where women slaved incessantly in smiling fields. We saw that the war had been fought with bridges—the one-way steel Baileys or the larger, two-way American structures of wood. The swiftly built Baileys did more to win the Italian campaign than any other single invention, and blown bridges offered only a slight obstacle to our advance. Only when we reached Foggia, where the airfields had been an allied target, did we see signs of the misery which Mussolini and his war had brought. It was a town of rubble, crumbling shells of buildings, and jagged walls. Bulldozers shoved the masonry about, stirring up clouds of gritty dust. Ragged kiddies in the ruins gave us the victory sign, which, in that setting, roused no elation.

The Americans, with practical candour, had huge notices up: "V. D. in this town. Give your wife or your girl friend a break." Then a little farther on was another notice: "PRO Station for Allied troops." (PRO standing for prophylactic. These stations, established all over Italy, were for the benefit of allied soldiers, who, despite all warnings, were intent on taking risks with local professionals.)

Bombs and beggars, venereal disease and underfed children, ruin and decay. Foggia in April, 1944, was a fine commentary on the rottenness of modern civilisation. It was also a commentary on the inaccuracy of average descriptions. Times without number I had been told that this town or that was "flat, completely razed to the ground." Foggia had been so described to me, but it had many jagged walls still standing and many blackened hulks of burnt-out buildings. Cassino was said to have been ground into the dust by

repeated bombings and shellings. In fact, although the damage was appalling, many of the solid stone buildings there were only half-demolished. It is astonishing how much high explosive is required to make a thorough job of destruction. I never saw a village in Italy which had been wiped completely out of existence as, I believe, were some of the villages of France by the repeated bombardments of the 1914-18 war.

We stopped just outside Foggia to lunch off bully, biscuits, cheese and chocolate in the shade of an ancient olive tree. Some New Zealanders had parked their truck near us and supplied hot water for our tea. There was an old covered well, and a tumbledown farmhouse with white-washed walls. An aged peasant, who looked like Rigoletto, saluted us gravely and respectfully. Then a South African captain, a military government officer, came bustling up and asked, unexpectedly, "Have you seen a man in a blue serge suit and a black homburg?" I said, "No. Why?"

"Oh, I want him for black-marketeering in grain," said the South African. Then, as a furtive figure moved among the trees of the olive grove, "Ah, that's him. So long." And he loped off in pursuit. It was the first hint I had of the worst racket that afflicted suffering Italy during the years from 1944 onwards. An Italian pre-view of the spiv. While beggars thronged the streets of the big towns and the poor lived in filthy squalor, as in the infamous caves of Naples, it was possible to buy meals in the black-market restaurants to satisfy the most sybaritic tastes—at greatly inflated prices. A good meal for two, at the prevailing exchange rate, cost about £5.

All forms of dishonesty, especially stealing and banditry, were rife. Possibly the best black-market story I know concerns an Irish Roman Catholic priest who left his car outside the senior officers' hotel in Rome only to find, when he emerged, that one of the wheels was missing. Tyres were fetching fabulous sums, and the priest was lucky not to have had all four stolen or to find the car itself vanished. However, nothing dashed, he had his car towed on the following morning to the tyre black market in Rome, where he waited patiently and hunted round the various stalls. After some

hours he spotted his own wheel, which the dealer, eager for a sale, politely fitted.

"Well, shure, that's perfect," said the good *monsignor*. "And now will ye carl at Vatican City for the money. I'd like ye to meet some carabinieri friends of mine there."

Naturally the dealer did not come. The *monsignor* had his wheel back and everybody was happy.

At our wayside luncheon party there was ample evidence of the complete mastery of the air already secured by the allies. The disappearance of the Luftwaffe from the Italian front is a decisive event in the campaign which has even now not been satisfactorily explained. Was it shortage of fuel, shortage of pilots, diversion to the Russian and home fronts, bombing of German aircraft factories, the manufacture of flying-bombs—all these things combined, or was one single factor the main cause?

Lightning fighters skimmed the tree-tops. High overhead cruised a formation of Fortresses. Our vast military traffic rumbled along the roads unmolested, whereas behind the German lines it was not safe to move anything in daylight. The Germans dug bolt-holes for their truck drivers each marked with a bundle of straw tied to a pole. Their transport was harassed without respite by our fighter-bombers, while our bombers cut the railway lines and demolished bridges over and over again. The marvel is that the Germans were able to fight on so tenaciously for so many weary months when the allied air forces had them squeezed so tightly by the gullet. During eight months in Italy I did not see a single German machine in the air. The air was so safely our own reserve that on one occasion I took a flying lesson in a Piper Cub just behind the lines at Cassino.

We resumed our journey, seeing on every hand signs of how amazingly cosmopolitan General Alexander's Army of Freedom had become. It was the most international army in history. Negroes, Indians, Gurkhas, Goums, and French passed us at various stages. I discovered, later on, a nationality for every letter of the alphabet, except X. A for Americans, B for Brazilians, C for Canadians, and so on, down to Z for Zulus. To find Maoris and Japanese Americans, Sikhs and Italian Bersaglieri, black, yellow,

brown and white men all fighting shoulder to shoulder with a minimum of friction, against a common foe, was convincing proof that humanity can be united for some purposes. When, however, so many of these troops were mercenaries, and the great majority conscripts, it becomes difficult to analyse the motives of these soldiers who fought and died together in the same cause. Was it for self-preservation, bread and butter, ideals, or—what? The more one sees of life, in war and peace, the more one is convinced of the truth of Bernard Shaw's thesis in *Back to Methuselah*, namely that man simply does not live long enough and develop his mental stature sufficiently to know what it is all about. He lives and dies an ignorant child, led always by the man who is a little craftier, a little stronger, a little more ambitious than himself.

We crossed the mountain ramparts, winding among the sparsely covered, drab slopes that were serving the enemy so well in his defensive struggle. The strangest form of locomotion we saw was a horse towing cyclists up a hill; the oldest, oxen pulling primitive ploughs. Then as we neared our journey's end Vesuvius broke on our tired sight. The volcano, quietening down after a recent eruption, was still vomiting dense volumes of black smoke, but they had cleared sufficiently to reveal that a great piece had been torn off the apex of the cone, flattening it much more than formerly. My colleagues in Naples had been busy, during the current quiet period in the war, describing the fearful and remorseless advance of a wall of lava upon a Vesuvian village. Human inertia is truly astonishing. Why do people continue to live in the shadow of a recurring menace, one that overwhelmed Pompeii and Herculaneum two thousand years ago? It might be said, I suppose, that we in London today are doing precisely the same thing—living in the shadow of the atom bomb.

The eruption of Vesuvius provided a diversion not only for my waiting colleagues, but also for General Alexander. In the intervals of approving the plans for the coming offensive he admired the spectacle from his room at Caserta. Nature had stolen his fire and thunder in advance.

We newcomers did not then pause to visit Pompeii, but I

the most fascinating example of "canned history" which I have ever seen. Its fallen stones, dug out of the volcanic dust, shout of wealth and licentiousness. There are innumerable reminders of a civilisation which, in many respects, uncomfortably resembles ours. Wandering among the roads marked with chariot wheels, through the bars, villas and temples, it required little imagination to picture myself as the representative of the *Pompeii Herald*. I could see myself leaning up against one of those bars, which still bore the marks of drinking vessels, gleaning the latest gossip.

Phallic good-luck symbols are carved everywhere; there is a brothel quarter where in one house pornographic mosaics are to be seen. The best villa in Pompeii, that of the Vettei brothers, wealthy bachelors, has at the entrance an obscene picture of Priapus, the God of Plenty, and there are other pornographic mosaics in the rooms. Touring Pompeii with a mixed party is an embarrassment because of the furtive antics and mutterings of the Neapolitan guides, who are anxious that the male visitors should miss nothing and that the women should not be shocked. So they succeed in irritating both sexes. In any case, small boys outside sell booklets from which no salacious detail is missing.

To complete the Pompeii visit one should also go to Naples Museum where there is much fine sculpture from Pompeii and Herculaneum, particularly figures from the forums. There is also a Sala Erotica there, not open to the public. One thinks inevitably of Sodom and Gomorrah and the wrath of God, of lustful Bacchanalian orgies brought to a sudden end by a catastrophe that blotted out the sun and rained death till where had been two fair cities remained nothing but an undulating plain of volcanic ashes. There are, in fact, scratched on one Pompeiian wall the words "Sodoma, Gomora" beneath a picture which is probably intended to represent the judgment of Solomon, but suggesting that some at least of the inhabitants had prophetic forebodings.

In Naples, Army Public Relations had acquired a commodious hillside villa in the agreeable Posillipo suburb, a leafy contrast to the agglomeration of slums and grim buildings that is Naples proper. There was not a great deal

of bomb damage in Naples, but one could not help the reflection that, if humanitarian feelings were set aside, it would have been a good thing for future generations to wipe out Naples and rebuild it. I remember once meeting H. G. Wells at a London luncheon just after I had come from a heavily bombed district of the East End. He shocked me, because when I button-holed him and told him of the devastation he suggested that, however horrific it seemed at the time, smashing up the slums would, in the end, be beneficial and give a great opportunity.

This conversation came back as I contemplated the squalor of Naples in the natural amphitheatre below us. In our villa—called Villa Ruffo—the “base wallah” correspondents had gathered in some force and, as if influenced by Neapolitan habits and housing standards, were “pigging it” in bare rooms from which practically all the furniture and the floor coverings had been removed. We slept on our camp beds, two or three to a room.

P. R. had won all hearts by starting a bar in a spacious room that overlooked the glorious sweep of Naples Bay. Capri, enchanted island veiled in wisps of sea mist, held out her tempting prospect. Actually few of us spared time to visit it or for any pleasure trips. But in that strained war-time atmosphere we were easily amused. I remember that soon after I arrived a great carboy of red wine exploded, for some chemical reason, and swamped the whole bar in vino. We paddled about giggling, bawling for “Antonio” and “Luigi” to come in and mop it up, which they did, in Italian tempo. It reminded me of that silly song “When the old Dun Cow caught fire.”

I soon discovered from my colleagues that my anxiety to get to the front lest I should miss important developments had been needless. After the recent, and as it turned out somewhat futile, bombing of Cassino and the Benedictine monastery, the war was static. An uneasy, ominous quiet prevailed over the locked lines from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian. Many professedly well-informed people, from London to Cairo, had, in conversation with me, gravely doubted whether the front would ever move again in Italy. They argued that in all history Rome had never been taken



from the south, that we were fighting against the grain of the country, and our repeated, costly failures at the key position of Cassino showed the folly of trying to push north against impregnable defences. They said that we were pinning down about twenty German divisions, that we had already acquired the airfields we needed at Foggia for the air blitz on Germany, and that there was little to be gained by the capture of Rome except prestige. It all seemed extremely plausible, and it was all wrong. I repeat it here because there are today, as ever, many pundits making equally confident predictions on many subjects who, I am sure, will be proved equally wrong. The moral seems to be to use one's own common sense and never mind about the too numerous opinionated know-alls of this world.

The facts were that behind our jagged, switchback front preparations were being made for the most concentrated offensive of the war up to that date, the first mighty blow in the last rounds of the attack on Hitler's European fortress. General Sir Oliver Leese's Eighth Army had been swiftly and secretly transferred from the Adriatic end of the line to the Cassino front. Briefly, the plan was to pack General Mark Clark's American Fifth Army<sup>1</sup> and the Eighth Army as tightly together as possible for an almighty slog on the narrow vital front between the Tyrrhenian and Cassino—roughly thirty miles wide.

The two main arteries, vital to defence and attack alike, were the coast road Highway Seven, otherwise Via Appia, and the Cassino-Rome road, Highway Six, otherwise Via Casilina. I came to know those two highways of death, horror and destruction as I know the Strand. They lured us like twin sirens, fed us like mothers, tormented us like demons—they were the be-all and end-all of existence. They meant for us hellish noise and dust, interminable weary journeys up and down in those so efficient and so damnably uncomfortable jeeps. But above all, dust, dust, DUST!! Shall I ever forget that clogging, blinding, suffocating dust that turned us from pink and white Anglo-Saxons into yellow men, brown men, black men and finally green men?

<sup>1</sup> We thought of it as American, though actually it was an allied army.

I did not know, on first arrival in Naples, what those two roads held in store. I only knew that they both led to Rome, classical Rome, the Rome of Romulus and Remus, Cicero and the Caesars, and that the goal lay about eighty miles beyond our positions at Cassino. At that time the advanced British Press camp was situated in a small hotel at Sessa Aurunca. Colonel Astley told me that the camp was being moved to a point on Highway Six about fifteen or twenty miles from Cassino. There we could operate, close to the front, on the main axis of Eighth Army's impending drive.

Public Relations was a strange organisation. As a class the correspondents were wont to abuse it heartily. They declared that they never had transport, that transmission facilities were invariably bad, that conducting officers looked after themselves first and the correspondents last. Nevertheless, when P. R. closed down after the war, many correspondents left in former operational theatres suddenly discovered that despised and rejected P. R. had in fact been doing quite a lot. They knew then what it was really like to be suddenly immobilised, and to be found wandering without visible means of subsistence. P. R., in fact, though a human institution and not a faultless machine, served an extremely useful purpose with remarkable efficiency.

As to transport, P.R., as a matter of principle, always professed to have none, but if pressed hard enough invariably produced it, even though we were squeezed three in the back of a cushionless, bumping jeep. P.R. also organised some excellent camps in which we often exercised the British prerogative of "bellyacheing" over this and that, but which, in fact, provided us with better food and as good lodgings as many British civilians were then enjoying. Such a camp was the one that had now been organised by Major David Heneker at Vairano, on Highway Six. Its main buildings were two Nissen huts—one used as an officers' and correspondents' mess, the other as a copy room where we wrote our despatches. A privileged minority—like the B.B.C. engineer—had caravans; the rest of us lived under canvas, with all the usual primitive features of camp life.

Although we did not know when the offensive was due to

begin, most of us were so eager to get to grips with our job that we needed no special persuasion to leave the fleshpot of Naples for the rural delights of Vairano. In the long lull before the coming storm it was a pleasant place, or would have been if our restless consciences had allowed us to sit waiting, instead of which we had to go tearing up and down the highways and byways, breathing in the dust and searching for stories. I met many new and old friends in the camp. Chief among the old ones was Edwin Tetlow, of the *Daily Mail*, whom I had known at Dover—an obvious though not typical North-countryman, lean, sometimes anxious, with the deep crow's feet of the experienced campaigner at the corners of his eyes, tireless in pursuit of a good story. Owing to the transport shortage we had to "team up" with somebody, and it was natural that it should be Tetlow, whose somewhat conspiratorial manner concealed a loyal disposition, a lively sense of humour and dogged perseverance. He and I jeeped many thousands of miles together with scarcely a word of disagreement, which, among the harassed, overworked and neurotic war correspondent fraternity, is saying something.

Most distinguished in appearance, most balanced in behaviour, and the most English of us all was tall, handsome Godfrey Talbot, B.B.C. team leader. He handled his temperamental followers with constant tact and ability. But perhaps the most lovable character was John Redfern, of the *Daily Express*, known as "the Bishop" because of his ecclesiastical knowledge, something altogether remarkable among his pagan colleagues. John, whom I joined again with the First Canadian Army in Holland, was essentially a gentle man, a man of peace. He had landed at Anzio, and when that operation became exceedingly sticky hung on like a Briton. He was a slight, unmilitary figure, wore large owlsh glasses and smoked a Sherlock Holmes pipe. As a personal revolt against the perpetual "old boying," he addressed everybody as "doctor." War strain took a peculiar form. In his dreams he became a bloodthirsty butcher, and the most bellicose man in Italy.

"Mow 'em down. Cut 'em up," he would shout, until

John Redfern had teamed with Tony Helliwell, of the *Daily Herald*, who was among the most intrepid of the war reporters at Vairano. A third member of their party was Graham Beamish of the Exchange Telegraph agency, a good-natured New Zealander.

Our camp had been pitched in a field of lupins, which we trampled underfoot. In choosing the site there was more than ordinary regard for local agriculture, for frequently allied boots, tanks and tyres made havoc in the cornfields. It was a pleasant situation. Besides the blue lupins, blood-red clover decorated our floor. The eastern backcloth was a vista of blue hills, with a solitary snow-capped peak as centre-piece. The camp was bounded to the north by a sunken road, to the east by Highway Six, and to the west by a gurgling brook. It was unbelievably quiet. If we ever heard a distant gun we wondered what was wrong. Nightingales sang in the surrounding thickets at night.

My tent contained nothing but a camp-bed and a rickety commandeered chair that served as wardrobe, dressing-table, and everything. But we had electric light, a great boon. Anyone who contends all men are equal and deserve equal rewards should have a spell of camp life. The difference in the comfort inside the various tents within a week was most marked. While I, and other journalistic colleagues, continued to live in humble style, some of the conducting officers and camp organisers had improved the interiors of their tents beyond recognition. Ex-Commando Captain Kenneth Best, a most resourceful and energetic conducting officer, dug down two or three feet to give himself headroom, covered the floor with a canvas carpet, procured ammunition boxes for a chest of drawers, chair and table from somewhere else, and Heaven knows how many other appointments. When visiting the genial Capitano I always felt as if I were stepping from an East End slum into a Park Lane suite. Best also organised a volley ball pitch, hacking down two small trees, with cheerful abandon, to provide the net posts. We used to play, with more enthusiasm than skill, hoping to wear down our fat.

A typical day began at 7.30 when an Italian orderly brought a cup of sickly, luke-warm tea. Then my batman

brought hot water in a tin bowl I had acquired at the Villa Ruffo, in Naples. Batmen are chosen usually for their abysmal ignorance of all things domestic. An equally important qualification is that they must blend the reluctance and craftiness of a school fag with the cheerfulness of Mark Tapley. They must show bovine phlegm in the face of adversity and treat their gentleman with that sympathy and kindness normally shown to domestic animals. I overheard my Jeeves saying to his mate in a resigned voice, sounding rather like a disgusted angler on landing a tiddler, "I got another one. Marshland Gander, or something."

After washing under the birch trees—it was always a problem where to put the bowl—my dressing followed its muddled course. Then came breakfast, consisting of fried egg and bacon or even a pork chop. It was a surly meal, for there were often hangovers to contend with. Then a suave conducting officer, in charge of the transport, would come round and ask us where we wanted to go. Usually we were not sure, and had one ear open for the other fellows' destinations. In the waiting period there was nothing obvious to do, except to fill in one's background by visiting this battalion or that, this division or that. Yet there was always a possibility of getting "scooped" by an enterprising colleague and of getting a "rocket" from London saying "*Daily Blank* has interesting story on so-and-so." A "rocket" phrased in such mild terms does not seem a serious matter, but the anguish, remorse, and bad temper bred in a correspondent's bosom on receiving one has to be experienced to be believed.

Our great treat—usually on Saturdays because there was no Sunday paper for many of the daily correspondents—was to dash into Naples for a bath or to buy things at the Officers' Shop. Tony Beckwith, one of the B.B.C. correspondents who had been an actor, was able, because of his numerous theatrical friends, to "lay on" seats at the Ensa shows. We saw Madge Elliot and Cyril Ritchard in *The Merry Widow*, Adrienne Allen and Emlyn Williams in *Blithe Spirit*, and other entertainments.

All the while preparations for the coming offensive were mounting steadily and the traffic along Highway Six grew

ever denser, noisier, and more dangerous—the engines of war ever more monstrous and peculiar. Bulldozers, bulldozing tanks, rafts, boats, Bailey bridge sections, guns, more guns, still more guns, “Ducks,” Crocodiles, Buffaloes, and enormous trucks. Sometimes came processions of lorries bringing back troops from leave—troops in Bank Holiday mood. Their favourite trick was to blow up rubber objects with which they were supplied into clusters of balloons, and they pelted the passers-by with bunches of garlic and other vegetables. Dear Tommy Atkins. He had learnt a few aitches since Kipling, but his spirit and good humour were identically the same.

*We aren't no thin red 'eroes, nor we aren't no blackguards too,  
But single men in barricks, most remarkable like you;  
An' if sometimes our conduct isn't all your fancy paints,  
Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints;  
While it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy,  
fall be'ind,"  
But it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's trouble  
in the wind—*

We marvelled at the tremendous diversion of human energy and activity that is modern war. Often we argued among ourselves and with serving officers and men as to the meaning of it all, but we could never come to any agreement except in the tendency to repeat the fine phrases of statesmen. It was providential that in the end the uncovering of the horror camps at Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau and elsewhere revealed plain for all to see the basic vileness and cruelty of the Nazi and Fascist doctrines.

General Sir Oliver Leese, who had taken over the command of Eighth Army from Montgomery, made a special point of getting to know personally all the correspondents attached to his forces. This was a great advance from the days when generals despised, resented and put many obstacles in the way of war correspondents. One day Major Heneker told me that the General had asked to see me at “Tac Army H.Q.,” his advanced base, also on Highway Six, but somewhat nearer Cassino than our Press camp.

No doubt the generals in the late war made their mistake but failure to make themselves known and loved by the men was not one of them. Thus, among the other ranks, one heard remarkably little of Kipling's being

*. . . sugared about by the old men  
(Panicky, perishin' old men)  
That 'amper and 'inder and scold men  
For fear of Stellenbosch!*

John Redfern and Pat Conger, of the American United Press agency, had also been invited to the General's tea party. We piled into a car and, with Heneker conducting, drove off down Highway Six looking for the tactical sign "Tac Army." These tactical signs, an open book to our expert drivers, were a lasting mystery to me. Each led, you knew the code numbers, to the headquarters of a given brigade, division, corps, or army. Later in the war, when the need for secrecy was less and the code was partially dropped, the system became still more confusing, for you never knew when, say, following a figure four, you were in fact on the axis of the Fourth Division or were following some totally different formation.

Eventually we turned off down one of the innumerable rough, rutted tracks that branched from the main road, passed a sentry, with a scrutiny but no challenge, and pulled up under some dusty beech trees. General Leese lived a gipsy existence in a caravan. As far as I remember, there were two, one which he used as an office and the other as a bedroom. He had a klaxon horn which he sounded when he wanted something but this was the only sign of authority or, indeed, urgency, about the little camp. After a brief wait we were all shown into the office caravan, to be received with hearty good humour by the General, who was in shirt sleeves and what looked like plus-fours. General Leese had the smooth, red, oval face of a country squire, an amiable manner, a tall, slim figure. He was in command of eleven divisions at that time, but looking at him one did not think of the tragic clash of armies but of red coats in the hunting field. In contrast to this old Etonian voice and poise, he had

some peculiar mannerisms, the most noticeable being a gesture with his thumb over his right shoulder strongly reminiscent of the Lambeth Walk.

He chatted in a pleasant, informal way for the best part of half an hour, seeking information rather than giving it, for he was deeply concerned at that critical moment with the sensitive morale of his troops. He was delighted that the men, moved from the mountainous sectors on the Adriatic side, were now able to play their beloved football on the flat country behind the Cassino front. But he knew that the Second Front was imminent and he wondered how his troops, themselves engaged in long-drawn battle, would react if they learnt that the troops from France were getting short leave denied to those in Italy because of transport difficulties. The General, half seriously, referred to himself as a "news-paper owner" because he controlled the two Army newspapers *Eighth Army News* and *Union Jack*. But one thing he could not do in his newspapers was criticise the Government!

His main psychological task at that moment was to make palatable the idea that his men were fighting their way home—not Rome but home. No easy matter when the front seemed something fixed and unchanging, like the sea coast, when we had no more certain knowledge of what went on behind that enemy line than we had of happenings in the mysterious ocean depths. We found it hard to realise that we were using one small section of a road which a Roman emperor had planned to run from Newcastle to Jerusalem—4,800 miles—the *Itinerarium Antoninum*.

The General told us of his immense hoard of cigarettes—half a million—which he intended to distribute among the troops before the coming offensive. He liked to give them personally, driving about in a little green-and-yellow camouflaged car and pulling up when the fancy took him. He also had a great stock of other comforts for the troops, one of the most consistent donors being Montgomery's mother, who, although her son had passed to another command, continued to regard the Eighth as her own adopted army. The General personally acknowledged all gifts besides answering the numerous letters—chiefly from



anxious mothers—which are received by every commander.

Another matter perturbing the General was the increasing number of requests for compassionate leave on the ground that wives had misconducted themselves. Sometimes, as he said, it was the best soldier in the battalion who was taken away.

Like most high-ranking officers, General Leese was a man with great powers of mental and physical endurance and his confidence was boundless. Already he had his plans for the occupation of Austria. He never doubted for an instant our ability to smash through the various formidable mountain lines which the enemy had drawn in our path in Italy.

It is the fashion, once wars are safely over, to stigmatize generals as inhuman monsters who callously sacrificed thousands of lives in obstinacy or selfish ambition. In many interviews with British generals throughout the war, however, and invariably left with the feeling that here was a man bearing more responsibility than was fair to ask. In my consideration, I feel, should temper any comfortable war criticisms which we may feel disposed to make of a commander or that. One could not expect a man who had won distinction in the hard and brutal trade of war to have a highly sensitive disposition, but one did find in ninety cases out of a hundred that our generals were human beings who gave long and anxious consideration to the welfare of their men.

After our interview we had tea with the General's staff officers in a tent close at hand. It was interesting, although there must have been many people in the kitchen, we did not get a single hint about the forthcoming offer of surrender. Looking back, the most remarkable feature of this affair was the extremely peaceful atmosphere in which everything was conducted. It was very much like having tea at a Vicar's, except that the talk was slightly more raucous, and that there were no women. We sipped our tea demurely, ate our cake and then when we felt we had reached that critical moment when you begin to outstay your welcome we said our "Thank yous" and departed.

In the peace years after 1918, I was brought up by reading to believe that generals were apoplectic, red-faced, stupid old buffers, who, in a commercial organisation, would be lucky to get jobs as office-boys. I now believe that they are infinitely better psychologists than the great majority of so-called successful business men and politicians. It is not merely military law which gives them command over men, but a profound and a sympathetic knowledge of human nature.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CASSINO WATCHER

NEWSPAPER accounts of the Italian campaign, concerned mainly with the sway of battle, gave little impression of the "front line." It was ill-defined and totally unlike that in World War I when two opposing lines of trenches stretched continuously from Switzerland to the North Sea, sometimes approaching so close to each other that our soldiers could almost hear the enemy gossiping.

In Italy, the division was marked sharply here and there by river strips—as along the Rapido—where the allies and the Germans crouched on opposite sides in weapon-pits and strongpoints. At Cassino itself the two sides were in such a close clinch in the shattered town that the whole place had to be covered constantly with a stifling smoke-screen to blind enemy observation.

At other points, we and the enemy sat on mountain peaks, often with miles of unoccupied valley in between. At some points the line was so thinly held by outpost positions that, at night, it was possible to walk through from one side to the other, if you were prepared to risk the mines. Many civilians and escaped prisoners of war did, in fact, pass through unchallenged—though they had to choose the right place and moment.

On the mountains, our troops, borrowing tactics from the North-West Frontier, built sangars, or stone breastworks. We, as the attackers, had nothing comparable with the formidable lines of concrete and steel forts which the Germans flung across Italy to bar our progress.

An amateur observer like myself is apt to be puzzled by the seeming simplicity of the war game, which lacks all the subtlety and complexity of one like chess. Why, for example, could not the allies—with their enormous superiority in

material—burst through on a weakly held sector, and roll up the whole line with a great outflanking movement? One answer is that the Italian terrain did not help the “swanning tank column,” but was a great advantage to a mobile defence in depth which made plentiful use of mines and the self-propelled gun.

Methods of reducing a mountain-bastion also seemed, in essence, perfectly simple. Either you went for it bald-headed, in an expensive frontal attack which often produced no particular result except a long casualty list, or you encircled it with two prongs which eventually met round the back and caused the position to fall into your hands by encirclement. In Italy, the third possibility of trying to reduce a position by wiping it off the map with an air attack was tried at Cassino, and, as Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham has frankly admitted, failed conspicuously.

At risk of being sententious, I must say that the difficulty lies not in choosing a method of attack but in the execution of it. Military genius is an infinite capacity for making gains. Though every commander is limited by the men and material at his disposal, failure is a crime. Wavell declares that the first essential in a good general is robustness and a capacity to withstand the shocks of war.

If war evolves along present lines it may be that some future date will see global issues settled between opposing generals or their chosen champions. This would be much more satisfactory to everybody, with the exception of the defeated person. I argue it this way. In Italy the proportion of combatant troops to line-of-communication troops was about one in five. It has also been calculated that it takes twelve civilian workers to keep one front-line soldier going.

At any given moment the number of troops in actual contact with the enemy, including gunners, was extremely small—I have heard the figure of one in fifty mentioned, though obviously it varied. Now to carry the reasoning a little farther, into the hideous era of atomic war and long-range weapons with wide-spreading blast, it will be excessively difficult for armies to have any direct physical contact at all.

. . . . .

My first guide to the battlefield was equable, sterling Philip Ure, of *The Times*. In the lull before the Press camp moved from the little inn at Sessa Aurunca to the new camp on Highway Six, he took me on country rambles along quiet lanes and through woods gay with spring flowers. On our first walk we climbed to a hilltop, where birds sang and there was no hint of war. Peasant women laboured unceasingly in the fields. Then we saw a solitary Piper Cub aircraft droning up and down in the middle distance. Ure said it was on artillery observation. It seemed an unwarrantable intrusion, but still there was no sound of firing.

Why the Germans did not fire on these flying "O. Pips" (observation posts), which, from a low height, pried into their forward positions and directed our overwhelming artillery fire, is something of a mystery. I assume that they were too scared, knowing that a gun-flash would bring terrible retribution. At a modest estimate, we were then firing twenty or thirty shells for every one returned.

To the west, from our vantage point, stretched a flat, cultivated plain through which the Garigliano river meandered. On January 17 and 18 of that year two divisions had crossed the Garigliano, near its mouth, on a ten-miles front, occupied the ruins of Minturno and established themselves firmly. They could not get ahead, however, as once again the Germans were looking down on them from the hills and our troops were bogged in marshy, flooded land. We maintained our positions across the river, covered the bridges with smoke and protected the roads on our side from enemy observation with canvas screens. When the great offensive started in May that foothold, like the one at Anzio, proved invaluable.

As Ure and I looked we could see the rolling clouds of white smoke that smothered the bridges. He told me that the Germans besides keeping up spasmodic harassing fire against the bridges also tried to float down mines to blow them up, but fortunately without success. There was something reptilian about those sluggish, artificial fogs hiding, one imagined, the beastliness of war. Any creeping horror might lurk in them. Ure pointed out to the north, among a cluster of dim peaks, one which he declared was

Monastery Hill. As we watched, a black column suddenly erupted in the foreground of our rural picture, followed by the delayed boom of an explosion. One solitary shell from the Hun. So this was the war. We were both surprised, and Ure, as if unaccustomed to having his country walks interfered with in this unseemly manner, seemed slightly annoyed.

Such was my introduction to the front. A quiet, rustic scene, with a hint of unseen, evil forces, and then, when you least expected it, an abrupt and senseless act of violence without apparent purpose, against the comfortable bosom of Mother Earth. That day our own formidable artillery, massing for the offensive, was silent. There was nothing to report on the front—"N.T.R." as it appeared on numerous commanders' daily reports, the equivalent of "All quiet" in the 1914-18 war.

A few days later I paid a more official visit to the front, this time under the wing of a conducting officer. I believe that in 1914-18 correspondents had difficulty in getting near the fighting. In this war, only personal discretion prevented the correspondents from seeing as much of the battle as they wished. We often dispensed with conducting officers and swanned off with nothing but native common sense and the enemy to stop us. Being a new boy, however, I wanted a Cook's tour and gratefully accepted the offer of Captain Dennis Heck, a typical public-school boy turned conducting officer, to take me as close to Cassino as was prudent.

Our jeep joined the swelling traffic stream on Highway Six and I drank in all the sights and sounds with the avidity of a tourist. Trucks, tanks, guns, and jeeps thundered along nose to tail, ignoring all precautions and all advice about spacing, confident that our complete mastery of the air gave them immunity from enemy attack. It was a metalled road with a fairly good surface, able to take, with comfort, only two lines of traffic and, in Roman style, ruled straight across the plain from point to point. On each side stretched the interminable camps, hospitals, vehicle and gun parks, and munition dumps of the allied troops. Here and there were pathetic groups of wayside crosses, the German ones, of Maltese pattern, being noticeably fewer than our own.

The Eighth Army, sometimes inspired by the Americans had indulged in an orgy of signposting. Many of the notices were admonitions to careful driving, and the overturned trucks in the ditches were evidence of the need. Others were designed to keep "rubber-necking" visitors away from Cassino. For instance, "Nosey Parkers endanger lives out, you!" and "Is your journey really necessary?"

Others dealt with a wide variety of subjects and had given facetious gentlemen an opportunity, as "Get up them hills but bring back that salvage," or "Greta Skeet Warplane. Give you Esposizione!" (this relating to an anti-military exhibition), or "Don't be a lousy son of a gun, use your Powder."

As we approached nearer to Cassino and the steep, limestone hills, crowned with shell-shattered medieval villages, and in on the road, the notices grew more ominous, as "No vehicles beyond this point." Finally we turned off the main highway and wound through liquid mud up a track. Heck said we were to the mountain village of Cervaro, from where we would get our best view of Cassino. We were now in the forward gun era. As we zig-zagged up we came constantly upon enemy emplacements, and on rounding a sharp corner we were occasionally be nearly frightened out of our wits by a violent ringing explosion from some half hidden snout. The symphony orchestra was tuning up. "Giving them a bit of stick," remarked Heck nonchalantly—a phrase so typical of English and the Army that we adopted it. The most violent bombardment was "Giving 'em a bit of stick," occasionally varied with the expression "a stonk."

We were making for the headquarters of 78th Division which at this time was holding the Cassino sector. Presently a military policeman advised us that we could take the vehicle no farther and must go on foot. We left the vehicle behind a crumbling wall, for Cervaro had been badly smashed by our artillery, and we continued to climb on foot. I passed to the crest of a rise and found my self staring apprehensively at a notice which said, bluntly, "You are now under enemy observation. Don't loiter and don't be a fool."

I was most anxious to follow this advice and loitered briefly at Heck who seemed entirely unimpressed by the stonk.

crouching behind some broken masonry, I stared at the ghostly white ruins of Cassino spread in a distant valley below. A dense white smoke-screen rolled over the landscape. Rising out of the billowing artificial clouds, and given majesty by them like a Himalayan peak poking through cumulus, was Monastery Hill. It was only 1,750 feet high, but it looked like Kinchinjunga to my excited imagination. It was, I suppose, at least two miles distant but seemed much closer. Through glasses I could see that the jagged walls of the bombed Benedictine monastery were still standing to a height of twenty feet or so. The bomb- and shell-blasted trees on the hill had the appearance of bristles on a giant's chin. A lonely, deserted road rambled downhill towards that smoky spectral valley. The enemy gave no sign of life; there were no shells, no mortar-bombs, but I imagined that a German was staring back at me through similar binoculars, wondering whether such an insignificant object was worth wasting ammunition on. My flesh crept and I have never felt so close to the Pearly Gates.

Heck looked at me curiously and remarked, "They don't take any notice of solitary jeeps, you know."

So this was Cassino, the Ypres of the late war, where in 217 B.C. Hannibal had also found himself in difficulties. Hannibal got away, we are told, by attaching lighted faggots to the tails of three hundred foxes, which distracted the Romans—a most unlikely yarn. My colleague Christopher Buckley, recalling this in his book *The Road to Rome*, remarks that he never saw a fox near Cassino. Neither did I, nor hear of one. If there had been any it is certain that Eighth Army would have organised a jeep hunt.

Even at safe distance the unhealthy position occupied by our troops in Cassino was obvious. We were then holding three-quarters of the town, which climbs up the lower slopes of Monastery Hill (Monte Cassino to the Italians). The Germans held only the western fringe, but they overlooked us everywhere, while the monastery dominated the whole place. Fanatics of the German First Parachute Division, from strongpoints in the ancient ruins of the Colosseum and the amphitheatre, and also in the newer ruins of the Continental Hotel and the Baron's Palace, watched for the slightest



movement. If they saw suspicious stirring they opened up with mortars or machine-guns. The ugliest weapon was a five-barrelled mortar which we called "moaning Minnie."

Highway Six, the only possible route for the supply of our troops in Cassino, was under full observation of the enemy for the vital stretch which ran across a Bailey bridge, spanning the Rapido, and then into the shattered town. To move along these last few kilometres in daylight was playing with death.

It was only too easy for the ignorant or unwary to make the mistake of going too far along Highway Six, across the Bailey bridge, and then to find himself suddenly pinned down by mortar fire on that eerie, empty road. This happened, on one occasion, to Buckley and Tetlow, who, thereafter, never failed to take the safer Cervaro turning to the right at a point where Highway Six, so far sheltered by hills on either side, swung abruptly into full view of the Germans. Along this perilous, treacherous road all supplies for Cassino had to be taken at night, generally by quiet-stepping mules.

In the Italian military text books Cassino was singled out as the ideal defensive position. Its natural strength defied modern invention, and the lessons learnt by Hannibal had not been changed by the passage of two thousand years or by the transition from elephants to Tiger tanks, swords to high explosives, horses to Typhoon fighters.

When we war correspondents of Eighth Army settled expectantly into our camp at Vairano in April, 1944, the moment for the final offensive on Cassino was drawing near. One striking demonstration of the confidence which Army commanders felt in war correspondents was the fact that they invariably revealed their full plans to the assembled journalists shortly before an offensive was launched. It was a far cry from the days of the Peninsular War when the Duke of Wellington wrote to Lord Liverpool, the Foreign Secretary, complaining that newspaper writers were giving away the numbers and dispositions of his troops. In 1944 the censorship organisation was a safeguard against dangerous leakages, though I sometimes wondered at the complete

of correspondents of many nationalities.

Early in May we were all summoned to Caserta to the vast, rambling palace which was being used as Allied Force Headquarters. Thirty or forty correspondents—British, Americans, French and Poles—heard Lieut.-General Harding, chief of staff to General Alexander. He stood in front of huge maps and we sat tensely on forms, straining to hear his quiet, firm voice.

"We have three defensive positions to smash through," he said. "The Gustav line hinged on Cassino, the Adolf Hitler line behind, and finally the Rimini-Pisa line. We expect the enemy to withdraw fighting rearguard actions to the general line Rimini-Pisa. This is an all-out attack. An all-out effort. First we intend to destroy the right wing of the German Tenth Army, then to drive what remains north of Rome to the Rimini-Pisa line. What we do here must have vital bearing on the Second Front."

He went on to explain that the regrouping of the Eighth Army meant that we would have a total of fourteen divisions—British, American, Polish, French, Indian, Canadian and South African—massed to attack five German divisions.

The whole offensive, he said, would develop into a converging assault on the Adolf Hitler line between Piedimonte and Pontecorvo by General Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army of Americans and French, and General Leese's mixed forces of the Eighth Army. At the right moment, he said, allied forces would break out of the Anzio bridgehead. Later, General Alexander described this plan to me as his "double-handed punch."

Best laid military plans on paper frequently fail because insufficient allowance has been made for human, material, and various imponderable elements. This particular plan for rolling up the German line in Italy in May, 1944, succeeded in practically every detail, except that the German forces were not annihilated. I remember that General Harding added a cautious note before we went: Don't expect rapid and spectacular advances. Don't estimate success in miles per day but in obstacles overcome.

I had come in at the middle of the campaign. In the five

hundred miles advance from Reggio, in Italy's toe, to the positions just short of Bologna where the lines froze for the last winter of the war, the allies had liberated 51,000 square miles of territory in fourteen months. In the wake of the allied armies the engineers repaired 9,300 miles of road and rebuilt more than a thousand miles of railways. In the six months' summer campaign then beginning the allies, it was estimated, destroyed the equivalent of fifteen German divisions, or half the total German strength employed.

It is true that the allies had complete air supremacy and many more tanks and guns, but against that the German under their skilled commander, Kesselring, had all the advantages of the difficult mountain terrain, full of seemingly impregnable positions, and the flexibility of one army. Kesselring, in Alexander's opinion, was always best when in trouble and a most difficult man to "catch off balance." He hung on to the last moment but never quite long enough to get his army completely destroyed.

On the day after our Caserta briefing General Lees assembled the Eighth Army correspondents at his "Tactical" headquarters. It was an alfresco gathering in a small natural amphitheatre. There was the usual map pinned to a blackboard, and the General, upon whom anxieties did not appear to weigh too heavily, was elated and optimistic.

He explained the Eighth Army plans in more detail. Cassino was to be enveloped and "pinched out." The two arms of the enveloping movement were to be formed respectively by the Polish Corps fighting over the mountain on the right and Thirteenth British Corps forming a bridgehead over the Rapido and Gari rivers on the left. We sat like schoolboys preparing for a sticky examination. I thought again of that sharp-tongued schoolmaster who prepared me for the High Elementary School examination and had expected to be called out to receive six of the best on the backside.

No such thing happened, in fact the General grew even more genial. He made his plan so clear that even the dumbest boy in the class could not fail to understand. "First the bridgehead; second, assault Cassino from the west and join up with the Poles; third, clear Cassino and open

Highway Six beyond; fourth, face up to the Adolf Hitler line."

It was hard to realise that lots of poor devils were going to be brutally slaughtered and others maimed for life. We did not think much about it. It was no use. In any case, we had the comforting reflections that the war correspondents were their own masters and would not be creeping forward into the unknown in the small hours of the following morning. But the trade was not without its risks. Two of the listening correspondents were dead men a few days later.

The General was intrigued by the possibilities of the French Colonial troops on the immediate left of the Eighth Army. In particular the fierce Moroccan Goums had gripped his imagination. "Nine thousand of them will be flooding over the mountains," he said, pointing with relish. The Goums became a legend and a grim joke with the Eighth. No story about their rape, their progress or their other deeds was too wild to be believed. Two or three days after the offensive had started some Goums were reported to have wandered into the Anzio bridgehead thirty miles away. It was an apocryphal yarn to marvel at.

After our lesson we wandered about in a flowering orchard drinking cups of tea and discussing what we would do. Nonchalance could not conceal the tension. We knew secrets that carried grave responsibility. Personally I was obsessed with a feeling of great inferiority to the fighting troops whose risks and trials were so much greater than any I was called upon to face.

The offensive was due to begin at 11 p.m. on May 11 with what was described as "forty minutes' counter-battery and counter-mortar fire for softening up the enemy's position." On Eighth Army front alone 1,100 guns had been concentrated for this hellish overture, and there were at least an equal number on Fifth Army front, perhaps more. Our guns outnumbered those of the Germans by not less than twenty to one. I suppose he must have had a few reconnaissance planes over at great heights, but I personally did not see any. The gigantic allied air forces which had swept the sky clear of opposition were also to concentrate at first on counter-

battery work. Later they were to attack and sever the enemy's road and rail communications.

Some of the correspondents, myself among them, wanted to see the opening barrage. We drove, in sombre mood through the mountain passes to a height called Monte Sammuco which commanded long vistas of the barren, surging country in the neighbourhood of Cassino. It was a clear, cold night and we, who had climbed up from the winding mountain road, stood, an awed group, in cathedral quiet under a starry dome. The silence was oppressive. We were waiting for a violent shock of noise, the biggest barrage since Alamein.

When it came, sharp at 11 p.m., it was at first a disappointment. I have been in storms that were more frightening, more spectacular. Then it mounted from a grumble to a terrifying crescendo. Brilliant flashes of light stabbed the valley below in quick succession, silhouetting the black mountains. The echoing noises merged into continuous thunder. We thanked God that we were on the right side of the lines as terror spoke with red and green Very lights from the German positions. There were yellow pinpoints in the distance and vivid flashes close at hand.

Rumbling tanks climbing up the mountain road added undertones to the racket. The rising moon glowered through dust and cloudy headlights groped at the hairpin corners. The loud-speaker of a police car joined in: "Keep moving, keep moving." They were Polish tanks, and soldiers in their black berets rode slumped and silent into battle. One shouted to us "English?" I felt sick in my stomach.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CASSINO CLIMBER

GENERAL LEESE recently told me that the first twenty-four hours of the final Cassino battle caused him the acutest anxiety he ever felt in Italy. The Poles, starting bravely on their uphill battle, were hurled back to their starting lines in a series of irresistible counter-attacks. Thirteen Corps were "only just over" the Rapido, hanging on precariously.

Suppose, after all, Cassino did prove impregnable? Three previous attempts had been made to lever the Germans out, and all ended in bloody failure. The corpses of Americans, New Zealanders, and Gurkhas rotting on the slopes of Monastery Hill, or buried in the rubble, were the grim evidence. The General, like all successful ones, was a magnificent shock-absorber and in those days showed no sign of the strain or uncertainty he felt.

It was the well-trained Eighth Indian Division, comprising both British and Indian troops, under its jovial leader Major-General "Pasha" Russell, which saved the situation. "Pasha" Russell was one of the old school. He had a fine brushed-up moustache which never drooped, even at the darkest moments. He fairly exuded confidence and regarded his men as his children. Forty-five minutes after the bombardment had opened, infantry crossed the Rapido (or Gari as it was sometimes called at this point) in assault boats. Then, on the other bank, they stumbled in files through the smoke and darkness, each man grasping the bayonet scabbard of the one in front.

It was their chief job to secure the bank while Indian sappers worked like demons, under both artillery and concentrated small arms fire, to fling a bridge across. The enemy held numerous strongpoints, particularly in the

village of San Angelo on the river bank. Despite the screen, the sappers were hideously exposed. Never one bridge was completed. Then another was brought in position in a novel, much quicker way. It was borne forward on the back of a Canadian tank, pushed by a second tank. By nine o'clock in the morning Canadian tanks were bringing blessed relief to the hard-pressed ring of British, Scottish, and Indian troops. They were just in time to stop off a German panzer thrust which would probably have thrown our men back across the river.

It was at this critical stage of the battle that Sepoy Ram, of the 3/8th Punjabis, won the V.C. for far more heroism unexcelled in the annals of war. He personally subdued one machine-gun post after another, slaying and capturing the German gunners.

We war correspondents were called upon to show rather different qualities. The days that followed the opening of the offensive were not so much lived as torn to shreds by strenuous mental and physical effort, intolerable excitement and strain. Our fight was not with the enemy but with traffic, dust, the clock, and our own weary brains.

We launched our jeeps, in the early morning, on the ebbing and flowing tide of Highway Six, hoping to get through to a corps, divisional, brigade, or battalion headquarters—according to the situation, and where we considered the best story might be found. The problem was to time our expedition so that we could be back at the camp in reasonable time to file a story for the following morning's paper.

To add to our perplexities, it was not easy to predict when it would be "reasonable time." We might return at, say, four o'clock, and find that the censor's office was piled high with copy "queuing up" for its turn on the radio to be broadcast. The delay might run to hours. On the other hand, if we returned at four o'clock, there might be some important development at the front which we should miss. As the offensive progressed, we arranged to rendezvous at the front with motor-cyclist despatch riders. Generally speaking, the arrangements made by Public Relations for transmitting copy from Italy were exceptionally good, though we

front began to move forward and the Press camp had to keep pace, hitches were apt to occur.

To meet the requirements of *The Daily Telegraph*, it was necessary to write a daily story covering the whole front. I could, as a rule, only go to one particular point. This meant weaving personal experience into a composite whole with intelligence reports received from other parts of the moving battle-front.

It happened that, as the Second Front was still in suspense, Page One of London newspapers was cleared for the news from Italy. Day after day, we hit double-column front-page headlines with our heartening, encouraging news. The harvest of heroic stories was superabundant. After the first uncertainties, all went well. The Gurkhas stormed San Angelo; the gallant Poles took impossible heights innocent of cover; the French, with their inexhaustible Colonial troops, moved through steep, wooded country as if on a hiking tour; the efficient Americans battered forward along the coast.

We were inspired with ever-mounting hope; infused with tireless energy. Every morning, at breakfast, Tetlow and I held earnest conference, consulting the intelligence reports. The eternal questions were: Where do we go for the best story? How long will it take to get back against the war-tide? What are our competitors doing?

In the early days of the offensive, chasing the French was one of our most exhilarating pastimes. We had the jeep sandbagged in case we ran over a mine, and folded back the windscreen to avoid splintering or semaphoring our presence to the enemy. The jeep was, at once, the most useful of all vehicles and the most uncomfortable. My posterior was hardened to the durability of leather by a slow and painful process, my humped body bent into a permanent question mark, my eyes made red-rimmed and bloodshot. Dust covered us from head to foot in a fine flour. We ran comparatively slight risk, because although fully mechanised we could never catch up with the horse and foot of the Goums and the Senegalese. It was the French who, in the words of the official bulletin, made the first "significant breach in the Gustav line" by capturing the mountain



bastion of Monte Majo, and then pressing forward impetuously into the hills to overwhelm many more hills and villages.

The Germans were terrified of them. I remember, on a mountain road, coming across a party of about sixty or seventy prisoners guarded by their jet-black Senegalese conquerors, who were, apparently, none too particular about giving them food or water. The Germans were in the last stages of exhaustion—haggard, filthy and unshaven, their hair thickly matted. They were pleading with cracked and broken voices for water, which pitying Italian peasant women were bringing by the bucketful.

A pleasanter memory is of the meals fit for any Paris gourmet which French staff officers laid-on in commandeered farmhouses. Elan, confidence and good-fellowship radiated from the heavy-laden table. What if a pullet should come squawking in and paddle through my soup before a grinning black man had captured it? What if conversation were difficult? Good chianti and laughter flowed together till we were sated. At one such meal, I recall, the General suddenly announced that a German war correspondent had been captured. There was a rush upstairs to see the strange animal sitting, doleful and solitary, in charge of a coloured guard. Then, abruptly, we British and American war correspondents fell silent and awkward. We glanced at each other furtively and could see that we were all thinking: "There, but for the grace of God . . ."

But the prisoner seemed glad to see us and eager to talk. I tried my best German on him and gathered that he was an Austrian. Enemy war correspondents were actual members of the armed forces and, I believe, generally held non-commissioned rank. The prisoner seemed envious of our position. Indeed, the British correspondents with the equivalent of captain's rank and expenses paid by their newspapers were privileged beings. When the Americans first appointed war correspondents they were made lieutenants until they asked to be brought into line with their British colleagues.

In the early stages of the offensive we never properly caught up with the French, because we were always under

compulsion to go tearing back to the Press camp to file copy. Much later in the Italian war, outside Siena, exuberant and volatile Wynford Vaughan Thomas, of the B.B.C., and I, did catch up with them and found it slightly too exhilarating. The Germans, in slow retreat, had been fighting a rearguard action outside the city. We had come to an advanced French artillery observation post situated in the hill castle of Grotti which commands a wide, rolling plain. Through powerful glasses we could see the towers of the "liquorice all-sorts" cathedral and the Palazzo Publico, as dark fingers in the haze. Cloud shadows drifted across ripening corn; a network of empty roads and tracks dreamed in tropical sunshine. It was a normal bucolic scene, except that every now and then the white plumes of shell-bursts erupted slowly before our eyes.

In the centre of the landscape, some miles from where we watched, stood a farmhouse on a lonely eminence, half hidden by a cluster of cypresses. The house in the cypresses fascinated us. It was designed by Heaven as a place of mystery, where dark and violent deeds occur. Then we grew tired of watching the smiling, tempting plain hour after hour. Some impatient demon of mischief suggested to me that we ought to venture forward to the House in the Cypresses. All was quiet, and so Wynford, nothing loth, drove me down the hill in his jeep and along the winding empty road towards Siena. Empty roads near the battle-front always spell danger. We stopped at a smaller farmhouse, just to make sure, and were rapturously greeted with wine and flowers.

On we went, in triumphal progress, to another small farm on the wayside. There were more flowers and more glasses of vino, more lashings of ecstasy. Finally, twin conquerors of the universe, we swept magnificently into the cypress grove. Here there was no wine and there were no flowers. A French officer greeted us civilly, but, I thought, looked slightly surprised. Many people, both civilians and soldiers, were huddled on the ground floor. It struck me as being distinctly overcrowded. So I went, with permission of the French officer, upstairs. In a bedroom I noticed some French soldiers sitting on the floor, and applied to a window

placed high in the wall was a pair of German periscope binoculars. I crouched at the eye-pieces and saw the German panther tank! Slowly, thoughtfully, the tank's turret was being rotated in the direction of the House of Cypresses. I, too, sat on the floor. On second thought I went downstairs and informed Wynford that we had caught some of the infectious élan of our French allies and had overdone it. We had got, at last, into the front seats of the front line.

The tank promptly opened fire. Masonry and splinters flew about. I thought that it would be truly ironic to be captured in a German counter-attack at that late stage of the war. We were moderately safe inside the house, chafed at inactivity, ruefully remembering the golden rule precept of the good correspondent—never get cut off from your transmission.

Wynford and I decided to make a bolt for it. We sped down the drive as if on an Alpine speed trial, and then, with full view of the German tank, shot madly down the export road. Ever since then my sympathies have been, more or less, ever, with scuttling rabbits. The German gunner must have hesitated. It is one of war's disadvantages that you cannot shout "Press" at the enemy. That tank-gunner might have had the excessively bad taste to wipe two well-known correspondents off the map. Fortunately he held his fire and is thus at last rewarded with a good write-up.

In the early days of the Gustav line assault we saw surprisingly little of the savage cruelty of war. I had imagined that I would see men falling all round me, de-gutted, mutilated, dying in hideous agonies. Instead we saw occasional black and bloated body lying stiff in a field, perhaps a pair of boots protruding from tumbled mass. Sometimes we met the walking wounded, stumbling, dazed and bloodstained; more often we saw them being tended in advanced hospitals. Pity blended with admiration for the "poor bloody infantry" of the British Army, who always bore the brunt without glamour and stolid, uncomplaining courage. Who was it said that the British soldier is the best in the world because he can be being frightened longer than the other chap?

I remember seeing a typical platoon walking into action near Cassino, in single file led by an officer—"a commonplace type with a stick and a pipe." Yes, he actually had a stick and a pipe. But instead of a dog at his heels there trudged the faithful file of men set of jaw and purpose. It reminded me of a school crocodile and suddenly my heart ached.

These men needed no panache. Each man carried a spade or pickaxe besides his weapons and pack. They were in shirt-sleeves, disclosing bronzed arms to match their faces. Their battle bowlers were at all angles, their battle-dress trousers and gaiters dust-covered. There was no singing or talking.

This variegated cosmopolitan front was full of picturesque contrasts. Not far from these phlegmatic Anglo-Saxons, the stately cloaked Goums were riding over mountain roads, sometimes followed by truck-loads of laughing, painted women. The French lorries and jeeps were all named to fancy—"Pantagruel," "Fifi," "Lulu," and so on. The British seldom bothered. When they did, imagination ran riot with the sort of names that are found on the gates of suburban houses and seaside bungalows.

. . . . .

The Gustav line cracked and yielded. On May 18 we set off for Corps headquarters to decide which point of the fluid front offered the best possibilities for the day. The intelligence officers were elated.

"The Guards in Cassino say that they can see the Polish flag flying on the monastery," said one of them.

There was no doubt what to do. The story of the day was the capture of the monastery. As we began, somewhat excitedly, to clamber into the jeep, the intelligence officer called after us: "I should be careful in Cassino. The Guards are still mopping up."

It was a cardinal principle never to trust first reports. Your life depended on it. So we called at a British divisional headquarters on Highway Six for confirmation. Yes, intelligence there agreed that the monastery had been taken.

We trundled off towards Cassino down Highway Six, where, for some reason, the traffic was lighter than usual.

When we came to the sheltered Cervaro bend, where a military policeman usually stood, we stopped and took counsel. Caution dictated that we should turn right as usual and climb up to Polish Corps headquarters for final confirmation. Strange to think now that our lives might have hung on that decision. Philip Ure, with two companions—Roderick Macdonald, an enterprising, light-hearted Australian writing for the *News Chronicle*, and Cyril Bewley, a plump and good-natured north-countryman on the Kemsley group—arrived at the same point shortly after us. They found that the traffic, instead of swinging right for safety, was rolling straight on. Concluding that it was now safe to drive into Cassino, along that exposed stretch of road hitherto commanded by the Germans on Monastery Hill, they went on.

It seemed the right decision, and had we noticed that the traffic was going on, we should undoubtedly have done the same. Unhappily, it ended in tragedy. In Cassino all seemed quiet. A Guards officer, now walking about freely among the rubble, began to take the three on a conducted tour of the former British front-line positions. Philip Ure, somehow, got separated from the others at a moment when, unexpectedly, the retiring Germans began to lob mortar bombs into Cassino. Macdonald and Bewley ran for cover, and, unluckily crossing a British minefield, were instantly killed. It was the greatest sorrow of the campaign to lose two such endearing companions and first-class reporters.

We who had taken the Cervaro turning did not hear of their deaths for some hours. On our arrival at the congeries of hillside shelters and dug-outs which comprised Polish headquarters, we found that other correspondents had had the same idea. Americans had flocked over from the Fifth Army, comprising, with the British, a mob of about twenty who clamoured for a guide to take us to the monastery.

Public Relations officers, intelligence officers and staff officers were unitedly of opinion that it was still too dangerous to attempt the climb over uncharted mountain battlefields. Personally I was willing to be convinced by their arguments, but some of my colleagues, newer to the game, were more obstinate. A message by carrier pigeon had been

received from the monastery as final evidence of possession. Then General Wladislaw Anders, the serious and polite Polish commander, came out to announce, with obvious pleasure, that he had received the personal thanks of General Leese. He was delighted by a diplomatic gesture which had permitted the Poles, exhausted by six days of murderous uphill fighting, to enter the ruined monastery. The Germans, squeezed out by the allied pincers, had retired, and General Anders, anxious to rest his men, had offered to let the British walk in. General Leese, however, insisted that the Poles should crown their great gallantry by occupying the monastery themselves.

It was about midday before the correspondents and photographers, whose numbers were swollen every few minutes by fresh arrivals, persuaded the Poles to appoint a guide to take us on our Everest expedition. Germans watching from distant heights must have felt a cold clutch of terror, thinking that the perfidious enemy was rushing up more reinforcements from his inexhaustible reserves, when we all set out. A long line of jeeps left Polish headquarters, raising mighty clouds of dust. It was "follow my leader," which meant following the jeep immediately in front.

The topography of the hills and valleys surrounding Cassino was extremely baffling. After about fifteen minutes' furious driving we found ourselves half-way back to the Press camp, having gone in entirely the wrong direction. There were angry conferences. One British conducting officer was heard to remark that "It's not *on*." However, it was on, very much on, and after more driving over winding, deeply rutted tracks we felt we were getting warm when we reached a lane pocked with shell holes and called "The Inferno." Every now and then we were temporarily lost in the acrid fog of smoke-screens.

At length we all dismounted at the foot of a steep feature known as Hill 539—its height in metres. From first to last I never saw our Polish guide. Trying desperately to follow the man in front, I began scrambling up a steep track, loose stones making a series of tiny avalanches. The barren hillside was marked with lazy drifts of mortar smoke as the enemy kept up a "slight harassing fire." At intervals we

passed blackening corpses of men and mules, and the burial squads were busy. Piles of splinter-riddled helmets, unexploded grenades, shells and all the wreckage of battle lay around.

Tetlow and Godfrey Talbot, who were climbing below me, shouted from time to time: "Tell 'em not to go so fast." I, remembering all the lessons of the Alps, "boloed" ahead, but the guide (if he existed at all) was far out of earshot. Sometimes we found white tape indicating a passage through a minefield and sometimes we did not, as we stumbled on.

I overtook Kenneth Best—who was incorrigibly romantic and addicted to ideas of "Excelsior"—struggling with a huge flagpole, destined to bear the strange device of the Polish flag.

We could not see the monastery, and had no certain idea where we were heading. Some thought that we were merely making for Polish Brigade headquarters. It seemed incredible folly to wander about like stray sheep on that corpse-strewn hillside; yet, having striven so far, we were reluctant to turn back. Our morale had been bolstered at the start by a good sit-down meal at Polish Corps headquarters, but it wobbled ominously from time to time. Such a moment came when we reached a Polish medical post, and at last struck a fairly well-defined path. We received some more vague directions coupled with the warning that it was advisable to keep spaced at fifty yards apart as there was mortaring on the path.

We could see the bombs plonking down at intervals. I started to run on the stony slope, fell flat on my face, picked myself up, and, wiping blood and gravel away, beat the Olympic hundred-metre record to a point where a fold of ground gave cover. I lay there panting, exhausted, terrified. This was a feature that had changed hands seven times. Spandaus were chattering not far away. But where was our side? I could not see a soul except an eccentric American reporter who had a Wild West sheriff's beard and a large patch of sticking plaster on his trousers. I had a ghastly suspicion that Hill 539 was about to change hands for the eighth time.

Staggering up, I forced my aching limbs into a jog-trot,

and presently, with immense relief, found myself under cover of a low stone wall. Then I overtook the stalwart Ken Best, and felt much better. In gratitude to Fate, I offered, quixotically, to carry that idiotic flag-pole, and, feeling uncommonly heroic, I trudged on.

The firing died away and the counter-attack with it. Such is the phantom warfare of today that I did not see a single Hun or a single Pole during these anxious moments.

We topped a rise, and then, at last, our struggles were rewarded. Across a small valley we saw what was left of the monastery, a vast, hollow tooth on the skyline. Its jagged walls were ghostly white. There had been a wood in the shallow valley, but, now, every tree was stripped, burnt and blasted. Bodies of Gurkhas lay about, in advanced decay, some of the few who, in the previous February, had rushed the ruins but had been unable to hold them. We trudged through the blasted wood and reached the mass of dust and rubble piled steeply round the shattered walls.

I was prepared for ruin and desolation but not for what was left. The monastery was a fortress almost as solid as the rock from which it grew. I guessed the thickness of its walls as eight or ten feet. At one corner the building was still standing to a height of three storeys, although thousands of tons of steel and high explosive had been showered on it.

The crypt and several chapels were intact. I wandered, feeling deeply emotional, in a dream-fantasy of spiritual and material chaos. In the best preserved chapel there were ten saintly frescoes. My guide-book said that they were "in the formal Bouron style." They were dedicated to the virtues, bearing the names "Paupertus," "Castias," "Obedientia," "Conversio," "Stabilitas," "Amor Dei," "Charitas," "Discretio," "Patientia," "Humilitas." The pious ten looked exactly like an inscrutable jury about to pass verdict on the lunatic follies of mankind.

Over a doorway was carved the motto of St. Benedict, "Pax." The irony was emphasised by a solitary stone dove, which had had one leg amputated by a flying splinter. I stumbled, wearily, over broken masonry, along what had once been quiet cloisters, round a courtyard piled high with debris. At the corners, scorched and withered palms still



cross bearing no name, a symbol of primitive religion surviving among the ruins of organised Christianity.

Pompeii—Cassino—and now this. Could one separate natural from man-made disasters? One's mind groped for the lesson in this vision of wrath and destruction through the ages, coming back frequently to futile adolescent railing at the madness of it all. There was only one verdict for the impassive jury on the wall: "Guilty, but temporarily insane." Yes, but one knew that the insanity would pass and then return, that the primitive instincts of the cave-man were still alive—all of them—elaborate and amplified. It was a gloomy prospect. Mankind itself had fallen off the steps.

In the meantime, like everybody else, I could only try to do my duty to the best of ability. One point that was exercising me was this: Were the Germans occupying the monastery when it was bombed? There were plentiful signs of occupation now. In one chapel there was a confused mass of soldiers' equipment and church robes that had apparently been used as blankets, lying on the altar. In a room, opening off a dark underground corridor, I came across three wounded German parachutists, who had been left behind with a note asking allied troops to look after them as it was impossible to evacuate them. In other places, I saw piles of empty cans, grenades, mortar bombs, and all the paraphernalia of German infantry.

But, immediately after the bombing, the late Abbot Diamare, head of the fraternity, gave a broadcast denouncing it and declaring that the Germans did not use the building. At the time it was thought that the aged Abbot was merely a tool for enemy propaganda. Then, fairly recently Don Martin, who was the Abbot's private secretary, said that the Germans only moved in after the place had been reduced to rubble. He described the bombing, charitably, as "one of the mistakes of the war."

General Leese tells me that he always treated the monastery as a strongly fortified enemy position, and kept it under artillery fire. The actual bombing was before he took over

command of the sector. Incidentally, Sir Oliver was himself a victim of one of the "mistakes of the war." He had been watching successive waves of bombers attacking the monastery from a convenient hilltop, and then returned to his headquarters at Venafro. As he dismounted from his vehicle he was met by a woebegone staff officer.

"You won't like this one, sir," said the white-faced G.S.O.

He was right. The General did not like it. A stick of bombs had been dropped on his camp. His caravan was upside down and there was complete havoc. He counted four huge bomb holes.

It was alleged, at the time, that the Americans were responsible. An eminent British scientist recently remarked to me that the Americans were actually extremely accurate bombers. Their whole trouble was that they had difficulty in recognising targets. However, as I myself later on greatly benefited from this American peculiarity I am not among their critics. There were several mountains round about exactly like Monastery Hill.

I have asked intelligence officers and failed to find any satisfactory evidence that the monastery was, in fact, occupied before our bombing. On Monastery Hill I saw several sangars which the Germans had been using, but undoubtedly the massive walls of the building must have been a protection. Moreover, while our gunners and bombers were anxious to avoid hitting it, the whole area around it tended to become a safety zone.<sup>1</sup>

Positions in, or near, the monastery gave exceptional observation over Highway Six. I stood on a heap of rubble on the "ramparts" looking down on a straight white ribbon, every inch of it pitilessly exposed for several miles. Nothing could have lived on it in daylight. This fortress built by the peace-loving fraternity could have withstood attacks from land or air indefinitely. The Germans retired from it only because they were encircled. British tanks had swung round in a left hook, cutting Highway Six in their rear.

We all stood round in a silent circle while the Poles erected

<sup>1</sup>I revisited Monte Cassino in 1949, and the new head of the fraternity,

their flagstaff, in which I felt some vested interest. Then, as their flag flapped in a light breeze, we all clapped politely like M.C.C. members applauding a maiden over at Lord's. While this was going on, I noticed that the enemy had put on a new bowler, a faster merchant. Mortar bombs were dropping across our own line of retreat with increasing frequency. We could not climb down the other side of the hill by the short, steep route to Cassino for fear of mines. So we ran the gauntlet back.

We exuded thankfulness and relief when we reached the Polish first-aid post, and they gave us cups of washy tea. A Polish soldier approached to show me a handsome gilt chalice which he had picked up in the monastery. He said that, in accordance with orders, he was handing it in to headquarters. I suspect that he first thought of it as a souvenir, but his conscience objected, and now he wanted a witness before the Almighty and his sergeant-major.

On the lower slopes of Hill 539 my legs began to seize up with stiffness. A passing American advised me to turn round and go backwards. I tried this and found it gave great relief. So, facing the foe like a hero, I hobbled painfully to the jeep park. The Press assault on the monastery was over. Some thought the war in Italy was also virtually over.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### ROMAN REVELLER

THE ITALIAN campaign first encouraged, then falsified, our hopes. After the Gustav line, the Hitler line was cracked. Sherman tanks poured through the neglected vineyards and olive groves of the Liri valley harrying the beaten enemy. General Mark Clark's Fifth Army began to punch a way out of the Anzio bridgehead.

We war correspondents chased after the elusive, moving front. Soon the journeys backwards and forwards became too long. We struck camp and moved into a deserted hill-side mansion near Cassino. My chief recollection is that it was black with flies. Tetlow and I had a competition to see who could slaughter most in a given time, but, though the score reached Australian cricket standards, it made no difference. My tent was pitched in the grounds and in the morning Helliwell pointed out that we had sited it on a very dead, but only partially buried, horse. This gave a slight thrill to genial Christopher Stone, who had come out to savour the horrors of war at the invitation of the Ministry of Information, and who had shared my tent for the night.

Further investigation showed that the Germans had used this mansion and its surroundings as a knacker's yard. It was curious that the Germans, who, in their own country, have the reputation of being one of the cleanest races in Europe, developed disgusting habits during their war campaigns. We objected less to the dead horses than to the other evidences of occupation. When German prisoners were questioned about these filthy and insanitary habits, they blamed primitive Russian troops who had changed sides and had been drafted to strengthen Kesselring's army. My own opinion is that our continuous bombing and shellfire was the

cause of animal behaviour. Men care little for civilised amenities when their lives are in hourly jeopardy.

Our daily dashes forward into the swirling battle increased in distance and difficulty. The forward surge of the Fifth and Eighth Armies revived childhood memories of the sea inexorably eroding a sand-castle. A rivulet would rush suddenly forward here or there; then abruptly dry up, to be followed by a second and a bigger torrent. A new arm of the sea would sweep round the battlements here or there. We could never tell with certainty which turret would collapse next, but we knew that the ocean, impelled by invisible forces, would overwhelm everything in time.

One morning I consulted the intelligence reports at the Press camp, and read that the Americans were only fifteen to twenty miles from the Anzio bridgehead. In war, twenty miles might be the equivalent of a thousand miles or it might be nothing. Everything depended upon what lay between the bridgehead and the advancing allies. Yet, for some occult reason, I had a hunch. Tetlow and I were opposites in one respect. His energies grew as the day progressed, mine declined. I was always at my freshest and best in the morning, whereas he was more normal in this respect. So I eagerly propounded to Tetlow the idea that we should make a bold dash across country and try to reach the bridgehead first. He was doubtful, but, after some consideration, agreed that we might test the possibility by going forward to Canadian Corps headquarters to make further inquiries. On the way, I continued to urge that it was now or never for the link-up story.

Canadian tanks were fording the Melfa river through two feet of water when, by following the usual cabalistic Corps signs on rough tracks, we at last found the information marquee. The contrast in information facilities provided by the various nationalities in the field was entertaining to us. The British favoured caravans, from which would emerge—instead of a gypsy fortune-teller—suave and friendly public school types who, with much talk of “stonking,” “swanning,” and “putting in the picture,” would eventually give us all the information they possessed. The Canadian

information tent was reminiscent of a fairground. Huge maps with our dispositions clearly marked were displayed everywhere. Loud-speakers blasted away lingering wisps of war fog: "Piedimonte is ours; Aquino is taken. Highway Six jammed with damaged and burnt-out vehicles strafed from the air. North of Pontecorvo the Hitler line is smashed. Canadian Corps has taken 500 prisoners."

Roll, bowl or pitch. The gallant Canadians were doing well and, quite properly, wanted everybody to know it. We found a genial staff officer and asked him about Anzio. "Why, yes," he said. "The Yanks are expected to link up today. Walkie-talkies are already in contact."

We wasted no more time. Jan Yindrich, of the *News Chronicle*, joined us and our jeep headed west for the Gulf of Gaeta. We planned to strike Highway Seven somewhere south of Formia, then to follow the coast as far as we could safely go. It all sounds so easy now. I cast my mind back to those anxious pauses as empty stretches of unknown road opened up. Was it safe to go ahead? Were the verges clear of mines? Why was there no other traffic? Should we take this fork or that?

I jotted in my notebook a rough course and marked it with a large question-mark. San Georgio—Orsonia—Formia—Itri—Fondi-Terracina. At last, with relief, we sighted the blue Tyrrhenian sea and joined the artery of Highway Seven taut with the flowing life-blood of Mark Clark's Fifth Army. Driving became smoother on the undamaged surface of this straight Roman road, but we battled now with the press of traffic comprising all the monstrous engines of modern devilment, and we choked with the dust.

We stopped in the battered town of Formia, which was almost deserted by its inhabitants, and had its streets strewn with broken glass and rubble. A few wretched, ragged children begged for our biscuits and bully beef when we stopped for lunch by the war memorial. This group of sculpture, one of the few things in Formia untouched by our shelling and bombing, showed an Italian soldier stripped to the waist, supplicating Heaven with extended arms. The ruin all about emphasised the symbolism, and the marble figure yearned for all suffering humanity. Who among its

creators foresaw that one day it would stand amid the wreckage of yet another catastrophic war?

We raced on, sometimes corkscrewing up mountain sections, sometimes diverted from the main highway where it was too badly damaged to pass traffic. Impressions of the unrolling canvas are merged together. The solitary grave of a Gefreiter by the road where we paused to gouge the dust from our bloodshot eyes . . . the jagged hole in a railway bridge where a shell had passed clean through . . . the picturesque mountain village of San Biagio, miraculously left untouched by the passing war, even to the railway station and the telegraph wires . . . hundreds of American soldiers bathing naked in the sea off Terracina.

Now we ceased to talk about Highway Seven. It was the Appian Way of Appius Claudius. Sixteen centuries ago when it was building there was war. Now the surface was of asphalt instead of stone blocks and gravel, but there was still war. Then the enemy was Pyrrhus, King of Epirus; now it was Hitler, who, deep in Russia, might have echoed the despairing cry of Pyrrhus as he contemplated the dead after his first victory: "One more such victory and I am undone." On that May afternoon the Appian Way was our Victory Way. Stretching like a Dutch dyke across the flooded Pontine marshes, it was pointing to Rome. Drumming in my head, amid the joy and fear, was a variation of Tennyson: "For men may come and men may go, but wars go on for ever."

The road across the marshes was suspiciously deserted. We guessed, and hoped, that American reconnaissance cars were ahead because the gaps left by numerous blown bridges had been filled in with rubble and earth. But there was a line of low hills to the east where the enemy might easily have a few 88-millimetre self-propelled guns ready to take pot shot at anything moving. However, we moved on steadily and there was no trouble. It was plain that the Germans were retreating as hard and fast as they could go.

Farm buildings, evidence of Mussolini's smallholding scheme, rose above the floods, and occupants rowed from one to another. None of the farms seemed to be damaged.

Then we had a foretaste of the ecstatic reception which the changeable and excitable Italian population were preparing for us in Rome. At every road-crossing scores of civilians, men, women and children, had gathered, laughing, cheering, crying. A babble of fluid Italian smote musically on our ears. "*Viva. Viva. Inglesi. Viva. Roma. Roma.*" One middle-aged man jogged around pointing to the word "*Liberatorio*" which he had painted on a wall in ragged, white characters. They bombarded us with flowers and offered us wine. The lurking suspicion that a few years earlier they had shown the same enthusiasm for their troops marching to fight the British in North Africa did not sour the sweetness of our welcome.

We stopped at one point where the reclaimed marshland rose above the floods and accepted the invitation of one of the farmers to enter his square, sparsely furnished house. His name was Angelo Negri, who farmed fifteen hectares of this Fascist colony. His pleasure and that of his stout wife at seeing us was genuine enough, but he had a tale of woe. He had nine children to feed and the Germans, on departing the previous day, had taken two prize porkers, sixty hens, and all the bicycles except one. They had also ruthlessly slaughtered his cattle, as skins drying on a fence testified. Still, the war was over for him, so he beamed at us, insisted on producing some precious "tea" from a secret store, and we drank it without milk or sugar, while the family stood round chattering.

A thousand miles away in Fleet Street sub-editors were preparing copy for the first edition, stabbing away with pencils, correcting or worsening the English, soling and heeling with scissors and paste. They had a touching faith that their correspondents in the field would somehow deliver the story of the day at the psychological moment. As we sipped the tasteless, herbal tea we felt anxious. Even if we did get through to Anzio it was by no means certain that we should be able to file a long descriptive from there. We knew that the cabling facilities in the bridgehead were limited and correspondents were rationed to a few hundred words each. We began to wonder, very seriously, whether we had done the right thing.



We said goodbye gratefully to the Negri family and pushed on. From what they had told us in a mixture of Italian and bad English, we gathered that the Germans, though looting their stocks, had not treated them brutally. I had the impression, however, that the Italian peasants were anxious to tell us what they thought we wanted to hear, and would have cheerfully, with special relish, described how the departed Hun lambasted them morning, noon and night.

We motored, with many misgivings, down the still deserted highway. For miles we had not seen a single American vehicle, soft or hard. Frankly, I did not like the look of it, despite the jubilant groups of civilians here and there. Then at the point where the road neared the Mussolini Canal, just short of Cisterna, we saw a German signpost pointing down a rough road marked "Nach Littoria." After a short conference we agreed that that would be the quickest way to reach the former beach-head. Our jeep nosed steeply and awkwardly in a gully among the ruins of a blown bridge, threatening momentarily to overturn. Then the wonderful vehicle climbed, almost vertically, up on to the continuation of the road. Next moment we all sat rigid, terror struggling with hope. The turret gun of an armoured car was pointing at us. I believed that it was British and prayed that the recognition was mutual, for the Germans were using a few captured jeeps. Hesitantly, it rolled towards us. I thought of the Wodehouse prodigal who returned to the baronial hall saying "Please I've come, don't shoot." A moment later, tension magnificently relaxed, we were warmly greeting Colonel Paddy Brett, of the First Reconnaissance Regiment, attached to the First British Division.

Throughout the war, I felt the greatest admiration for the newly formed Reconnaissance Regiments of the British Army. It was their dangerous job to be the probing spear-head, always running a serious risk of mines and the concealed enemy gun.

Brett had come from Anzio and we were the first British he had met from the "other side." They joined up with an American reconnaissance squadron at 9 a.m., he said, and altogether had been working for sixteen hours lifting mines

and improvising bridges. There are no trade-union hours in war, no five-day weeks, no strikes. All are united in unstinting effort.

Brett's team had been entertained during their arduous patrol by the sight of bridges going up, as the Bosche pulled out fast. Another diversion was talking to the Yanks, coming up from Terracina, on the new "walkie-talkie" sets.

The Colonel was too tired to be elated; we were too anxious to delay. We wished that *we* had a "walkie-talkie" to phone our stories back. Undoubtedly, censorship difficulties permitting, it will be part of a war correspondent's equipment in future. We climbed in again and went tearing down the road towards Anzio. We had reached the rubble-strewn streets of Littoria when Tetlow yelled, "Stop. What the hell are we doing?"

I stared, in some annoyance.

"Don't waste time, let's get on," I snapped.

"What the hell for?" demanded Tetlow excitedly. "We shall only find a long queue of correspondents waiting to file. We shall be rationed to fifty words each on the portable transmitter, and probably our stories will take forty-eight hours to reach London. We ought to go back to Naples."

A vision of those faithful, patient sub-editors, shambling in from supper and demanding "Where's Gander's copy?" arose in my mind. I made a feeble protest that Naples was a hundred miles away and that we should be against the traffic tide. It was also long past 7 p.m. Yindrich was neutral but judicious, as we argued the pros and cons, wasting precious minutes. Then we decided to gamble on returning to Naples, with its unlimited transmission facilities, its instantaneous connection with London.

Hours later, bone-weary figures, half-asleep on their feet, stumbled up the narrow stairway of the Press building in Naples. It was nearly midnight before we had slugged out the last "takes" of copy, sending it off a few sentences at a time. But we beat everybody on the link-up story. When not nodding off to sleep in the jeep, I had been wondering how to put it in a nutshell. London would know from

agencies the mere facts of the link-up. Eventually I decided to start the story: "I motored from Cassino to the Anzio beach-head today—proof positive that the junction between the main Fifth Army and the beach-head forces is firm and solid."

Whether this was the best approach I do not presume to say. The opening phrase has taxed the brains of journalists ever since the cult of putting the story in the first sentence arose. Mr. Churchill, having his own solution, began one of his stories about the Boer War like this: "Boom. Thud, thud. Boom, boom. Thud-thud-thud, thud, thud, thud-boom." It was his onomatopoeic way of describing the heavy cannonading at Ladysmith.

. . . . .

Relief and satisfaction at a good story completed to the best of ability soon gave place to a new concern. The fall of Rome, grand climax to the campaign, could only be a matter of days. Originally it had been intended that the Fifth and Eighth Armies, comrades in arms, should march in triumphantly side by side. Then, as the Fifth Army forces breaking out of the Anzio bridgehead swung round, it became apparent that Rome could, conveniently, be occupied by the Fifth Army alone.

General Mark W. Clark, the American commander of the Fifth Army, was excessively anxious for this honour, and made it fairly plain. Generals Alexander and Leese courteously agreed. The Eighth Army, which had marched two thousand miles from Alamein, politely stood back and bowed the Fifth Army forward. The Eighth surrendered its loved and hated Highway Six to the Fifth, and paused for three days in order to allow them to go forward. I doubt very much whether our allies of the Fifth Army fully recognised or even realised this act of generosity.

On the whole, the Eighth Army accepted the decision philosophically, but there was much disappointment when leave to visit Rome was refused for some time. Although General Mark Clark, the human leaning tower of Pisa, may have lacked the charm and diplomacy of an Eisenhower, and was apt to betray his eagerness, I cannot agree with

some of the criticisms which my colleagues, both British and American, levelled against him.

Eric Sevareid, that earnest and competent radio reporter for the Columbia Broadcasting System of America, is specially severe on Mark Clark.<sup>1</sup> He criticises the General for saying, in Rome: "This is a great day for the Fifth Army." It was not, apparently, adds Sevareid, a great day for the world, for the allies, for all the suffering people who had desperately looked towards the time of peace. Men of the Eighth Army, he asserts, without whose efforts this day could not have occurred did not soon forget the remark. I disagree with Sevareid's implied criticisms, because in the first place the great majority of the Eighth Army did not hear it or read it.

Secondly, General Mark Clark was seeking by American business and publicity methods to encourage *esprit de corps* in the Fifth Army. And why not? It was a pity, perhaps, that the General did not insist upon a token force of Eighth Army men marching with their American allies into Rome, but, with events moving so swiftly, it would have been intensely difficult to organise. Furthermore, to avoid jealousies among the various nationalities represented in the Eighth Army would have been almost impossible.

From the days of victory columns in stone to those of victory columns in printer's type, false modesty has been discarded from the armoury of the successful commander. If, in the official American hand-outs, the Fifth was always described as "General Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army" my only feeling was that the Fifth Army's Public Relations Director was doing a good job of salesmanship.

As far as we British correspondents of the Eighth Army were concerned, we had no cause to complain of General Clark's attitude. On the contrary, his D.P.R. made it clear that everybody would be welcome in Rome but we would have to take over our own transport and provisions. We sat in the fly-ridden knackers' yard, near Cassino, making our plans. Sometimes a monstrous toad, the biggest I have ever seen, hobbled out of a slimy pond to watch us with baleful, bulbous eyes. We called him Mussolini.

One day at the beginning of June the summons came. There had been some sly manœuvring among the correspondents over the matter of trailers to carry our belongings. My party was among the lucky ones. We had a trailer to throw everything in, and set off for Anzio again, tense with excitement, full of hope. The journey was remarkable only for a collision with an American truck which came to a sudden halt on crowded Highway Seven. A notch in my shinbone today is a relic of this encounter. At the time everybody was permitted to voice a grievance except me. My leg was not broken, so what? Nobody else was injured, except perhaps the two drivers, who seemed to consider that their professional pride was hurt.

We disembarked at the sea-front building in Anzio's High Street which had served as a Press headquarters. Vaughan Thomas, red-faced and effervescent, was there in the basement room where he had been the life and soul of the party at all times. We all pow-wowed over prospects. There were the usual rumours, alarums and excursions, about our plans for entering Rome. Some thought entry was imminent; others that it would take another week. The enemy forces, extended in a great sixty miles arc, were reeling back, harassed incessantly by the allied air forces. Velletri and Valmontone were ours, but fanatics of the First German Parachute Division were holding out in pockets of the Alban Hills. We slept uneasily on camp beds in the Press headquarters and then were off again at dawn, with uncertain plans, leaving the bulk of our kit at Anzio.

Anxiety neurosis affected us all, I suppose, in greater or less degree. Who was going to be first into Rome? That was the question uppermost in our minds. I cannot think of anything that mattered less to the general newspaper reader or the war effort. It was infantile but it was Our Game. We took it with the deadly seriousness of Olympic athletes. The trouble was that we did not know what track we would be racing on. Track Seven ran through the Alban Hills, where the going was apparently not good. Would Track Six be the best way? There was no starter's gun; only the stopper's gun. The first prize was a "lead story." The

maximum penalty—death. The numerous obstructions, material or human, fixed or moving, turned it into an obstacle race. Some of the American agency reporters thought it might be a sack race.

We jockeyed for position amid the rumbling traffic. Many correspondents had set off before dawn, but the wise ones, guessing that rearguard actions and mines would cause inevitable hold-ups, started later. Our particular jeep—carrying Yindrich, Tetlow and me—bumped through blasted Cisterna and on to Velletri, also a sorry mess. There we picked up a stranded U.S. photographer who had disagreed with his jeep-mates about the route. After many tedious diversions and traffic-blocks we joined Highway Six near Valmontone.

Jimmy Cooper, of the *Daily Express*, passed us going back. He shouted out, "There's a hold-up. You won't get anywhere." We smiled incredulously. Cooper spoke the truth, but not the whole truth. He was actually taking a leaf out of the Tetlow-Gander book and motoring all the way back to Naples for ensured communications. He had, however, been able to leave John Redfern, who had been covering for the *Express* in Anzio, and also Walter Lucas, who had been accredited by the *Express* to the R.A.F. It was a smart move, but, after all, the *Express* were three to one. Moreover, Cooper could only describe the skirmishing on the outskirts and did not himself enter Rome until some days after the liberation.

The arrival on the scene of black-haired Walter Lucas, who spoke with the slightest impediment and had a reputation for mordant wit, calls for a slight digression. He had, very surprisingly, sprung from my previous life in Bombay, where, however, he was not a journalist but had some job with the B.B. and C.I. Railway. He was an old Wellingtonian and a fine cricketer, making many centuries for the Bombay Gymkhana. Other claims to fame were that he was a cousin of "E.V." and was a fellow trooper in the Light Horse.

He had been Eric Linklater's companion on the journey back from India by the land route through Russia, amusingly described in *The Man on My Back*. Lucas magnificently

upheld the Englishman's reputation for self-depreciation and imperturbability. He called all reporters, himself included, "bog rats." Nobody seemed to take offence.

By the strangest chance Eric Linklater also turned up, a little later, wearing a major's uniform. He had been appointed by the War Office to write a history of the campaign and was, like the rest of us, attached to Public Relations. It seemed as though some queer magnetism had drawn the three of us together again, like the Three Musketeers, although in characters, disposition and upbringing we all differed radically. How Lucas came to be representing the *Express* is too long a story to relate here.

Trying to reconstruct the picture of those last few miles to Rome, I have bent puzzled brows over my scrappy pencilled notes. They are eloquent of hysteria and danger, wanton destruction, incessant strain. I scribbled: "Labico—cheers—burnt lorries—abandoned guns—8 kilometres from Rome hold-up—88's, mortars, snipers—tanks passing twined with Rambler roses—children sitting on tanks borrowing binoculars from the Yanks—crump of mortars—road blocked—trees, mines, snipers."

We came to a final halt just by a large empty building near the eighth kilometre milestone. It was only slightly damaged and was being used as an advanced dressing station. Sherman tanks, decorated with Rambler roses by dazed but happy villagers, were stationary in a long line, the leaders lost to sight round a bend. Fearless kiddies, as my notes indicate, were clambering over them.

On the general principle that where the tanks would not go we did not care to lead the way, we stopped. A nonchalant American, lounging on one of the Shermans, supplied the information that there was a road-block just round the bend of the road. At that moment the enemy supplied confirmation. Bang! Bang! Shells from two hidden 88's screamed overhead. The American continued to chew gum phlegmatically and politely offered me a piece. Never-failing liberality, in all circumstances, was the outstanding characteristic of the G.I. He always wanted to share everything, even the privilege of being shot at by the Hun.

to say, instead of taking immediate action we began to argue as to what was best. Bang! Bang! continued the 88's. John Redfern and Helliwell had also arrived on the scene, and likewise paused to confer.

At this moment an extraordinary thing happened, like the figment of a pipe-dream. A complete wedding party came walking down the road. The bride, dressed in a smart going-away costume, walked in a trance of happiness holding the hand of her groom, who was hatless, and wore a dark lounge suit. Two bridesmaids dressed in pink georgette, carrying little bouquets, followed, and there was a procession of wedding guests.

As we gazed in astonishment, some conscientious American gunners in our rear began to augment the wedding music by replying to the German, 88's. A two-way traffic in high explosive moaned overhead. Eric Linklater, arriving in another jeep, remarked that the bridesmaids wilted like corn in a summer breeze. The bride, however, took no notice, except to smile radiantly, and the bridegroom came up and shook us enthusiastically by the hands. Their wedding, at the church of Santa Felice di Centocelle, was an island of bliss in a sea of tanks.

Although I did not relish being caught between two fires, I thought it was reasonably safe so long as the rival gunners blazed away at each other. Also I thought that by going back we would merely run into trouble. So I favoured staying where we were under cover, with the object of moving forward cautiously when opportunity presented. Yindrich agreed with me. Tetlow thought otherwise, believing always in hanging on to his communications. Eventually our conducting officer (I believe it was Dennis Heck) said that he would go back with the jeep and return to pick up anybody who wanted to stay.

Yindrich and I got out and sat in a convenient shell-hole by the roadside. More as a piece of bravado than anything else, I began to type out the opening sentence of a story. It was hard to know what to write at that stage, but an American in the dressing station supplied me with something. His was a peculiar injury. He had been in the leading tank when



it was hit by two shells. The explosions did nothing more than blow him into the roadway causing him to dislocate a shoulder.

Sharing the shell-hole was a lean and saturnine American reporter called Kennedy who stared inscrutably at the world through thick glasses. He was working for the Associated Press, and, as an American agency man, this was a critical moment for him. It was a supreme chance for a beat or for being beaten. His chief rival was a bulky Bohemian named Packard, of the United Press, who defied gravity by heaving his amiable, sometimes feverish figure round the battlefields at incredible speeds. He was often accompanied by his wife Eleanor, who somehow, despite all "tut-tutting" about women correspondents in the field, always managed to be in the forefront of battle and was, in my experience, braver and harder than most men. I called her Pistol Packard mamma.

In passing, I must add that women correspondents, who were generally discouraged because they increased accommodation problems in awkward places, accomplished marvels. Sometimes the courtesy of British or American generals gave the women an advantage. More often, owing to the feeling among Public Relations officers that their responsibilities were needlessly increased, the women had to face more difficulties than men.

Despite all this, elegant Rita Hume, an American agency reporter, was one of the first in Rome. I almost wrote "the first," but there are so many claimants for this singular honour, including the Packards, that I dared not.

Anyway, seated that day in the shell-hole I was weary and ill at ease, as my fingers wandered idly over the typewriter's keys. It was not a note of music that brought happy release, but a long enduring silence. The shelling had stopped. Kennedy, with deliberation, reared his lanky form. I now regretted bitterly that I had no vehicle, but on the spur of the moment begged a lift from Kennedy. He was intent on getting a quick story back to New York and was obviously none too keen on encumbering his jeep with lost Englishmen. However, Americans are far more generous

with lifts than any other nationality, so he said: "Hop on." Yindrich and I complied.

We all went chasing down the road, noticing with renewed misgiving that the tanks had still not moved. Then we heard a crackle of rifle fire and that curious whip-lash noise of bullets. We came to a traffic jam in an avenue of trees. Our jeep halted abruptly, and I was conscious of a continuous rattling noise. Staring round vaguely, I noticed some tin hats poking out of a ditch. About a dozen of my colleagues, mostly Americans, were squatting in this dry ditch banging out stories.

I jumped out of the jeep and crawled forward along the ditch to investigate. Two self-propelled guns and a handful of suicide troops occupying suburban houses were holding up an army. Bullets whanged about, but I could not see much. Where the trees ended, the road curved round a stretch of heath or open grassland looking something like a golf course. I could see a long, irregular line of G.I.s moving forward in short rushes over the uneven ground, flopping down every now and then. Brigadier-General Frederick, who commanded a special "Commando" regiment of Americans and Canadians, was watching his men going into action.

Suddenly there was a flurry on the road as a motor-cycle escort came scorching along, preceding a vehicle carrying the tall, thin figure of General Mark Clark. He descended and issued curt orders, inaudible to me. Severeid declares that he instructed his subordinate commanders that they must be across the city limits by four o'clock that afternoon, as he had to have a photograph taken. Personally, I find it hard to take this story seriously.

My own judgment of the situation was that although a few forward elements might cross the city limits that night, it would occur late, and, with limited transmission facilities, we could expect to get practically nothing in the following morning's paper. Had we known it, that night all London newspaper offices were tense with a terrific suspense that had nothing to do with the imminent fall of Rome. It was the eve of the landings in Normandy.

My immediate concern was to find my jeep again and the

new Press headquarters. The whole installation, with censors and radio transmitters, had been uprooted from Anzio overnight and was now, we fondly hoped, being replanted somewhere close at hand. I worked my way back along the ditch and found a general move among the reporters to get back with their stories. I rejoined Yindrich and we looked round vainly for Kennedy. Slowly the awful truth dawned that, intent on filing, he could not wait, and had cleared off. The worst was that he had inadvertently taken my typewriter with him. This was terrible. I had now lost both jeep and typewriter on the eve of the biggest story of the campaign.

Looking round wildly I saw the ample form of Packard pouring into a jeep. His tousled hair was thick with dust, his grin a smudge in chalk. "Sure, hop in," he said to my request.

Things were not so bad after all. In about an hour we had found the new Press set-up, installed in an evacuated block of workers' apartment buildings. American technicians were working like fiends to get the radio in order. Once again the obvious lesson came home that the finest story in the world is useless if you have no means of communicating it. It was hours before the radio was working. Even when it did function we were all strictly rationed for words and it repeatedly broke down.

Our conducting officer, I discovered, had come forward for us again but somehow missed us. Kennedy was at the new Press headquarters and handed over the typewriter with apologies.

The majority of the British correspondents decided, in the circumstances, to stay in the neighbourhood of the Press transmitter till there was definite news that Rome was ours. Most of the villas in the neighbourhood, obviously owned by wealthy people, were undamaged but empty of furniture. Whether the furniture, curtains and bedding had been looted by the Germans or whether it had been put into store for safety, I do not know. We laid our blankets down on the bare floors of a handsome modern villa, preparing to spend the night. The house, by some whim of its unknown owner, had a curious tower. We climbed up it and through glasses

searched the haze for the swelling domes and tranquil spires of Rome. We thought we could pick out Castel San Angelo and St. Peter's. Rumour said that Rome had been declared an open city by the Germans, but, as we watched, black smoke erupted here and there, followed by the rumble of explosions. We conjectured that the Germans might be indulging in a final orgy of destruction. In actual fact they were merely blowing up bridges to delay our advance.

Late in the afternoon I was gazing at the distant city like an Israelite at the Promised Land, with Eric Linklater and Philip Jordan, then of the *News Chronicle*. There were some unusually heavy explosions. A pall of smoke lay heavy over it. I said: "My God. They're burning Rome. What a story!"

Linklater was terribly pained. "Burning Rome, and all he thinks about is a story."

Was it the blood of my namesake Genseric, the Vandal? It was not. Nothing more than professional zeal, like a surgeon who might see a horrible growth and say: "What a chance for an operation!" I was privileged to be present at history in the making and I felt as G. M. Trevelyan might had he been able to see the sacking of a monastery by Viking pirates. However, when Linklater made that remark my mind rushed back twenty years. I was a learner-reporter again, coming back from the inquests and hearing, with sickening horror, my colleague on the *Stratford Express* asking: "Any good stories?"

I blushed. My atrophied soul jerked convulsively, if transiently, to life. I started to explain to Link., but I fear that explanations were wasted. Attitudes of mind towards the approaching event differed vastly. Vaughan Thomas told me that he met a G.I. mooching somewhat moodily along the road who said to him: "Say, fellah, what's this burg we're coming to?" At the other extreme were Linklater's feelings, which can be imagined from his own account of how, when, much later in the campaign, he found Botticelli's "Primavera," he knelt and kissed the pregnant Venus, the flowery girl, and the loveliest of the Graces.

Soldiers, artists, men of culture, men of action, men of dreams or men of carnal appetites—we were advancing on Rome, noblest city of Europe.

I spent an uneasy, sleepless night writhing on the floor of the deserted villa. Because of the time-lag between London and New York, our American colleagues still had a chance of making the last editions of the next morning paper, whereas we had none and could, theoretically, rest our efforts for the morning. Several of them penetrated to the heart of Rome before the last Germans had cleared it. But it was not merely a question of endurance, enterprising and tireless energy. Transmission still counted much. Winston Burdett, of the Columbia Broadcasting System, reached the centre of Rome by midnight and drove round alone in the moonlight while frightened faces peered at him from windows. He wrote a broadcast which was never heard because Naples did not pick it up.

Tall and blond Dan de Luce, of Associated Press, actually jeeped all the way back to Naples and, I believe, had one of those precious "beats" with his descriptive. But, as I have explained before, I write about these matters with trepidation. The jungle warfare among American agency reporters is fierce and merciless.

During most of the campaign I would have doubted the existence of the Luftwaffe but for the sight of bullet-riddled skeletons on abandoned airfields. That night, however, some brave isolated German pilot finally dispelled the possibility of sleep. He swooped down and strafed the highway. Some of his shells came fairly near our villa, but it almost seemed intended as a spiteful attack on the Press.

Hollow-eyed and unshaven, we made another dawn start, embarking on a day of wild emotion. Like a river with its lock-gates open, the traffic, wheeled and foot, boiled down Highway Six. Signs of war were few. Once I saw a German corpse, which nobody would take the trouble to move, lying stiff on a pavement; here and there some burnt-out transport. Then the violent outburst of joy from people who suddenly found themselves freed from fear and tyrannical overwhelmed us.

At first they seemed hardly aware of what had happened and were crouching terrified in their houses.

Then, first in rivulets, later in torrents, they began to pour into the streets. It became a carnival of flowers and colour, mounting steadily in excitement and gaiety as the day went on. American infantry filing wearily along the road had their helmets decked with roses; there were kisses, laughter and tears; crowds upon crowds; cheers upon cheers; flags sprouting everywhere; children swarming on the jeeps and guns; black-haired girls in bright summer frocks clambering into the jeeps.

We entered Rome by the Porta Maggiore, the crowds growing ever denser and more hysterical with relief and joy. Soon our pace was funereal, and our jeep could hardly force a way through. American G.I.s, with typical generosity, were showering the crowds with chewing-gum and cigarettes. Emotion ran a mad gamut from thankfulness and incontinent delight to diabolical hate.

In St. Peter's Square an enormous concourse estimated at 100,000 had gathered, summoned by the bells. The Pope, a tiny figure in white robes, moved out on to the balcony, made the sign of the Cross and offered thanks to God for the sparing of Rome. The murmuring crowd fell silent and in one impressive mass movement knelt, wave upon wave, in prayer. Escaped British prisoners of war, who had been harboured in the Vatican, chiefly by the Irish priests, mingled with the crowds, seeking eagerly for a few words with their countrymen in khaki.

Violent contrast was offered by the scene in the Piazza di Venezia, overlooked by the balcony from which Mussolini, synthetic Caesar, had raved and ranted. The gleaming white "wedding cake" of the Victor Emmanuel monument, a riot of rococo art, lifted in vulgar splendour above a seething mob. Our jeep was gradually brought to a standstill by the weight of admirers who clambered on to the bonnet, the trailer, or anywhere they could get a hand or foothold.

One girl had contrived to dress herself up in the traditional

Suddenly there was a savage knocking of Sten-gun fire and a mad surging round the gloomy Venice Insurance building. The iron-gates were closed, but inside Italian partisans, their faces distorted with the killer's lust, were hunting down members of the Fascist African Police—the P.A.I. They fired blindly down the echoing corridors. Then a chase developed in the square itself; a screaming, lynching mob began to pursue someone supposed to be a Gestapo informer. He took refuge in the Palazzo Venezia. I tried to follow to discover what it was all about but was pulled this way and that, and eventually gave it up. A woman with a haggard, tear-stained face clutched my arm and said, in English: "They killed my brother. I want to help. What can I do? Tell me what I can do?"

Some told us that they had been feeding on grass or that they had to pay the equivalent of five shillings for one egg. They said that fuel was practically unobtainable; that there was a daily hunt for charcoal. Bakeries had been looted by starving crowds. These privations had not, apparently, affected the vitality of the Roman population. Moreover, as we soon discovered, fashionable restaurants could provide expensive sybarite meals for anyone who could pay. A party of us were eating together in one of these places when two dazzling lovelies joined us uninvited at the table. They kept saying "Bella Roma," although it seemed to be Roman bellies in which they were chiefly interested. They had the audacity to tell us that they had been sleeping with Germans. I think the truth was that they were anxious for protection. We had enormous difficulty in getting rid of them.

We made our way, as arranged with Public Relations, to the Stampa Estera building, a place used by the foreign Press correspondents. It was a remarkable institution. Foreign newspapers had offices there before the war, but there was also a club and a common room. When we arrived, there was indescribable pandemonium, contributed by chattering, giggling *demi-mondaines*, journalists of all nations, typewriters, and the celebrations of stray G.I.s. Stunned by the uproar, mentally and physically exhausted, I sat down to write my first despatch about the entry into Rome. What was the world waiting to learn? Surely that

Rome was saved for civilisation, that the art treasures, the monuments, and the ancient soil itself had been untouched by the passing war. Only one church had in fact been damaged, namely San Lorenzo Fuori, bombed by mistake when allied aircraft attacked the railway sidings.

We were swamped with news items that flowed in about living conditions, Gestapo terrors, the German retreat, and escaped prisoners. Major-General Gambier Parry, of the Second Armoured Division, who had been captured in Libya in 1941, emerged from hiding, overjoyed at the sight of British uniforms. He had been released at the time of the Italian armistice, but when the Germans arrived had had to go underground, hidden by courageous Italians, for four weary months.

General Mark Clark, that afternoon, held a conference at Rome's civic centre, the Campidoglio, where the three flags of Britain, France, and the United States now flew side by side. His Corps Commanders were there—Major-General Lucien Truscott and Major-General Geoffrey Keyes, the Americans, and General Juin, the Frenchman. It was here, with the crowds of reporters and photographers pressing round like impatient customers at street-sale, that General Clark made his statement which I have already quoted. My own shorthand notes show that he also added: "French, British and American troops of the Fifth Army have made this great victory possible." He paid a tribute to the Air Force and also to the fallen, and added: "Great, untold quantities of equipment have been captured—guns, tanks, lorries. We have not had the opportunity of gathering it up. Rome is completely occupied and both American Corps have passed to the north bank of the Tiber without contact with the enemy."

Incidentally it was remarkable that the Germans did not blow a single bridge of the Tiber within the city precincts. They had kept scrupulously to their promise to treat Rome as an open city.

. . . . .

Next morning some of us were sitting once more at littered desks in the Stampa Estera, banging out second-day stories



on our typewriters, when a Public Relations officer and said: "Relax, boys. They've landed." A silence and a buzz of excited chatter. It was D-day and Eisenhower had issued his first bulletin. We immediately threw ourselves to the role of forgotten men, knowing that newspapers would not want much from Italy without desperate, critical battles of the Normandy beach-landing raging. Personally I was deeply disappointed at not being there and with heavy heart wrote a cable to the team. "Good luck and good wishes to all our Second team."

Most of the correspondents then abandoned their trip to an orgy of sightseeing. The accommodation problem was solved by taking over the Hotel de la Ville at the top of Via Sistina, close by the Pincio Gardens and the Villa di Spagna. My room on the top floor commanded a view of the spires, domes and squares which is printed on my wall for a lifetime—a picture of serene nobility. Our immediate surroundings were steeped in history and legend. The room where an officers' club was started, were once the gardens of Lucullus where Messalina, wife of Claudius, fed her slaves. Two minutes away, down the Spanish Steps, was the place where Keats died.

At first, the British and American reporters lived in peace at the de la Ville in reasonable amity, but eventually a judicial separation was arranged. This was chiefly because of the abominable American practice of putting treacle, pancakes, peanut butter and bacon all on one plate at the same time.

Pope Pius XII and the Vatican were the inner centre-pieces of Roman life; untouched by war and unbigoted, perhaps, but free from sordid passion. The gilded, bronzed doors of the Vatican Palace, guarded by Swiss halberdiers in their gorgeous medieval uniforms, were open to the allied troops. Soldiers of many nations clattered, in heavy army boots and battle-stained uniforms, down the marble corridors of the world's most beautiful treasure-house.

These men from Minneapolis or Warsaw, London, Jamnagar, Marseilles or Morocco had recently been

with man's latest toys for smashing masonry and pulping flesh. Now they stared, with varying degrees of appreciation, at Michelangelo's masterpiece on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, at the Raphaels, the Laocoön and creative art in a multitude of forms and infinite range of colours. If they did not properly appreciate everything they were in good company.

It was Dickens who wrote: "When I see a jolly young waterman representing a cherubim or a Barclay and Perkins's drayman depicted as an evangelist, I see nothing to commend or admire in the performance, however great its reputed painter. Neither am I partial to libellous angels, who play on fiddles or bassoons for the edification of sprawling monks, apparently in liquor. . . . I do honestly believe that there can be no place in the world where such intolerable abortions begotten of the sculptor's chisel are to be found in such profusion as in Rome."

The Pope held daily audiences for the allied troops, who, when I attended one, clumped in their hundreds into the Sala Regia with great wonderment but scant reverence. A great hum of conversation filled the ornate chamber, jaws worked on gum, cameras clicked—occasionally someone would drop his tin hat on the floor with a mighty crash. Four Noble Guards pushed a way through the throng to the dais, sweeping a path for His Holiness, whose frail, ascetic figure, in white vestments, dominated the uncouth with natural dignity.

It was not easy to obtain silence for the papal blessing. When this was achieved, His Holiness, speaking fluent English in a thin voice and with a pronounced foreign accent, said: "Dearly beloved friends, Providence has appointed us to bid you welcome and to greet you with all our heart's affection. We greet you, and we pray God, with all His love and mercy, may be with you always. We bless all you here, personally, and send our blessing to your loved ones at home."

Uneasy silence had fallen during this moving little speech of welcome. Then somebody began to clap. Others glared

mobbed him. It reminded me of Bradman returning to the pavilion after a double century, pestered by back-slappers and autograph hunters. The Pope must have found this performance a considerable ordeal, but he continued day after day. On leaving, every man was given a lesser rosary.

I did not blush for shame so much on that occasion as a day or two later when His Holiness held a special reception for the Press. Our numbers had been swollen by a considerable following of hangers-on, who, with all the photographers, reporters and Public Relations officers, made a small ragtime army. We were ushered into the gorgeous Hall of the Throne, and lined up round the wall, by patient, if slightly worried attendants, for presentation. When the Pope entered, however, the photographers abandoned all pretence at decorum and made one concerted rush, jostling one another out of the way with coarse remarks. The Pope, who had begun to speak from the Throne, made a mild deprecating gesture, but when one impudent photographer stood right in front of him to get a close-up a tail-coated attendant ran angrily forward and pushed the camera down. I thought for a moment that, infuriated by the cameraman's impious conduct, he was going to dash it against the wall.

Despite this crude and unmannerly performance the Pope came all round the room speaking to everybody in turn. Some few dropped to their knees and kissed his ring, the majority shook him by the hand. He did not know the difference between our uniforms. Though I was wearing British battle-dress he said to me in his grave, kind voice "American?" In other cases this mistake would not have been so surprising, for some of my colleagues' uniforms were most oddly assorted. Mrs. Packard, having no wardrobe with her in Rome, arrived in khaki trousers.

We made occasional sorties to the ever receding front to see how the war was progressing, but, more often, we concentrated on seeing Rome in the days immediately after the liberation. We revelled in our luck as a privileged class free to sample the delights of Rome while Eighth Army soldiers could, at best, make only short dashes into the city on leave.

But I do not fancy that the bulk of the Eighth Army had any sense of deprivation or envy. In idle moments I tried to interpret their feelings in a jingle.

*Let's have a shufti at the Pantheon,  
Let's have a dekko at the Dome,  
Come, old cockalorum,  
We'll recce round the Forum:  
We've twenty-four hours to see Rome.*

*Let's butcher's hook at the Tiber,  
Let's mail the pukka gen home.  
We'll do the Colosseum  
And the Vatican Museum:  
We've twenty-four hours to see Rome.*

*Let's take the signorinas jeeping,  
Let's see where Musso used to foam.  
We'll have a spot of vino  
By the Arch of Constantino:  
We've twenty-four hours to see Rome.*

*Then let's have a basinful of Blighty  
Let's read the rest in a tome;  
Better be in High Street, Wapping,  
Where the missus does her shopping,  
Than spend twenty-four weeks in Rome.*

It is common experience to find the Colosseum the most fascinating and impressive of all Rome's weathered ruins. I returned to it again and again to walk in imagination with the milling crowds of two thousand years ago, pressing eagerly up those stone stairways into the empty tiers. The Colosseum is in such marvellous preservation that it was little effort to people the empty seats with 50,000 roaring, laughing, blood-crazed spectators. Their faces were those of the partisans shooting to kill in the corridors of the gloomy insurance building. In the arena were the wild beasts, the gladiators, the naval battles, the Christian martyrs passing

before the mind's eye in a bloodstained, cruel pagea centuries.

Vespasian's whim, an enduring monument to power and sadistic pleasures, still stands two-thirds after defying weather, earthquakes, barbarians and Some of us shuddered to think what might have happened to its arches, columns and stairways if, by one of the navigational errors which frequently occurred in allied pilots had dropped a few thousand-pound bombs. Somehow the Colosseum helped to restore faith in progress. It was so like the Wembley Stadium, a football fan, but it is a more edifying spectacle than managed massacres. Also the Colosseum stood as a reminder that all Rome, like Paris and Athens, had spared in this so-called total war.

In the city of baths it was natural that bathing should be one of our chief amusements. My bearded colleague in the *Daily Telegraph*, Martin Moore, who arrived from London to be political correspondent, preferred the sulphur baths at Acque Albule, near Tivoli, where the legionaries once resorted to disinfect themselves after a sojourn in outlandish parts. I accompanied him there twice, and it was a weird experience. The horror of sulphuretted hydrogen, associated with the gas at school, assailed the nose long before one reached the baths.

The water was a milky fluid in which lumps of solid fat floated. It was the form, apparently, to seize these greasy lumps and rub them over one's limbs and body. The principle best stated as: "Don't go where you can't swim." This served me well on one occasion when on a cruise in the Sunderbunds, the channels that divide the tiger mangrove swamps at the mouth of the Ganges. In my innocence I proposed to my companions that we should have a swim. They, equally ignorant, enthusiastically agreed that it would be a good thing for me. When I looked at the dark-brown flood surging by, I changed my mind.

Until that moment I had seen no sign of anything whatever on shore, but shortly afterwards my eyes

opped out when I saw a perfectly good "mugger," or crocodile, slither out of the forest and plop into the opaque water.

Here, at the sulphur baths, I had to conquer my feelings and ignore my principles to dive into the milky way. Part of the ritual was to stand under a little waterfall and let the ice-cold water pound one's body. There were no crocodiles but a few mermaids. After these various torments I persuaded myself that I felt much better.

There was more normal bathing in the blue Tyrrhenian Sea and in the fresh water of Lake Bracciano, where we disappeared like pot-bellied dryads on the wooded shores. Only nagging conscience prevented the enjoyment of this extraordinary holiday oasis in a world at war.

On the whole, allied troops behaved well towards the Italian population, though there were persistent stories about the raping proclivities of the Goums. The only suggestive incident which I can recall did not involve the hooded Moroccans but some G.I.s. It occurred when I was having a hair-cut in a small shop in Rome. A good-looking Italian woman came rushing in excitedly, chattering and, strange to say, smiling. She was pursued by three lusty G.I.s, all somewhat intoxicated.

"O.K., boys. I got the razors covered," remarked one of the intruders. Then he noticed me and, extending a paw, said: "Say, you're British, aren't you." Rising uneasily and taking a tip from the fugitive, I also smiled and shook his hand.

The little barber, laying down the razor, settled the whole matter with much gesticulation and expostulation. He scribbled down an address and handed it to the G.I.s, who departed in reasonably good order leaving the woman composing herself in a chair and, I fancy, looking, with typical perversity, just a shade disappointed.

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Slowly the German line was rolled back to Kesselring's last strongholds in the Apennines. Generally, at this stage, our stories were based on the intelligence reports collated in Rome and handed out. Unsatisfactory as this may seem, it

was the only possible way of giving a comprehensive picture. It was, however, apt to be misunderstood by certain Army officers who thought that correspondents buried themselves in an advanced Press camp acquiring special merit by proximity to the retreating enemy, although in my experience, only once did any shells fall anywhere near a Press camp. Each correspondent worked on the principle of satisfying the requirements of his own paper, and shunned mock heroics.

Tetlow and I once made a dash to Perugia, to record an astonishing sight of a former colonel in the Irish Guards walking down the road, in his 1914-18 uniform, to meet the oncoming Guards of 1944. He had been resident in Italy throughout the war. I was not chosen, to my distinct regret, for the unhappy Elba incident. Most of us regarded Elba as supremely unimportant—a place that would fall into British hands in any case as the advance along the main axis continued. Not so some of those in high places. Elba seemed, was to be a test-tube for French Colonial troops. The German garrison fought with desperation and there was a bloody shambles on the beaches. Walter Lucas was in a landing craft, and when, according to his own story, he was braced to swim forty miles to Corsica rather than face that murderous fire again, he was picked up by another British landing craft and dumped back on the beach.

My most cherished memory of those late summer days when, with twenty-six other correspondents and photographers, I was presented to the King. The advanced Press camp of Eighth Army was, at that time, at Arezzo, and the presentation was made at General Leese's Tac headquarters on a pleasant hillside not far away. I have always marvelled at the endurance of royalty, but never more so than at the King, showing no signs of fatigue after a continuous round of inspections, flying and motoring from dawn to dusk, spoke to each one of us at the beginning of yet another exhausting day. He asked each correspondent how long he had been away from England.

We were all somewhat anxious about this question of saluting. Some of us had practised it surreptitiously, but

secret vice, but we still felt sloppy and self-conscious. There was the possibility of hitting the chap on the right in the eye if you swung up in too violent and sweeping a movement. On the other hand, if you short-circuited, it might become a naval salute or something crabbed and servile like a taxi-driver touching his cap. Redfern, strange to say, despite his unmilitary appearance, gave the best salute of anybody. In any case I am perfectly certain that the King was not in the least concerned about the quality of our saluting.

The timing of a royal visit to the front and the security arrangements are matters of great moment and delicacy. It was important that the hold-up of traffic involved should not interfere with military operations. Redfern, Helliwell and I, when jeeping to an air-strip (known as a "whizzer strip") that His Majesty was due to visit, saw an awkward incident. At a hairpin bend, on a mountain road, we came to a traffic block. Tanks, trucks and jeeps were stuck in a congealed mass, stopped by a solitary military policeman. Beyond this hold-up the road was empty, and curved away downhill to the air-strip.

Presently a jeep, with a whip radio aerial, came weaving through the block, carrying a fuming brigadier. He ignored the red-cap and turned the jeep down a steep bank, at grave risk of overturning, in order to reach the section of empty road beyond the hold-up. The policeman came rushing forward and stopped the Brigadier's jeep.

"Get out of my way," barked the irate brass-hat. "What's the reason for all this? I have an attack going in and I need these tanks."

"Sorry, sir. The King's arriving any moment."

The Brigadier insisted that he must pass, but a provost came up and reinforced the red-cap. "My orders are definite, sir," said the Provost.

The Brigadier then began to radio back angrily to his headquarters. What the outcome was I do not know, but, as he continued to fulminate, and to wait, I judge it was not satisfactory. At that moment the issue was decided by the arrival of the King's procession of cars, which passed in a couple of minutes. The traffic-block was released. I have



not the slightest doubt that His Majesty w  
on the side of the Brigadier had he known.

We all formed a great admiration for th  
way in which the King fulfilled his too n  
Correspondents who accompanied the royal  
that they were worn out with trying to ke  
missing meals in the rush.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### RIVIERA TRIPPER

EASILY the worst-kept secret of the war was the allied plan to invade the South of France. It was impossible to conceal the vast movements of troops down to Naples for embarkation, and Italian tongues wagged merrily.

Eisenhower has disclosed that this invasion was the subject of his longest sustained argument with Mr. Churchill. The idea of the "Anvil" operation, as it was called, was the capture of Marseilles, to provide an extra port of entry for American reinforcements. But the "hammer" in Normandy was too far away from the "anvil" in Southern France. According to Eisenhower, Mr. Churchill maintained that troops could be better brought in through the Brittany ports. He also favoured using all available troops in Italy to invade the Balkans round the head of the Adriatic.

Generals Alexander and Leese lined up with the Prime Minister. They were convinced that, with the forces at their disposal, they could burst through the Gothic line, the last German defensive system in the northern Apennines. Austria and the Balkans would then lie open. A quick junction with the Russians was possible.

Alexander was particularly vehement in his opposition to "Anvil," later called "Dragoon." The proposal was to deprive him of no less than seven seasoned divisions—four French and three American. He knew that it would mean abandoning all hope of a speedy end to the Italian campaign. Whatever substitutes were offered—and the Brazilians were among them—a long period of reorganisation and training must follow.

The movement of seven divisions—something like 100,000 men and countless machines—to launch them on a seaborne invasion was a colossal diversion of effort, prodigally wasteful

of time and shipping resources. It was a Joe Louis slog which hit air, and ultimately reduced the Grand Plan for invading the Balkans to petty tickling described in the next chapter. I doubt whether the Southern France invasion achieved anything substantial at all, beyond causing a number of unvirtuous and unpatriotic French maidens to have their heads shaved and painted red, white and blue.

There had been the usual difficulty about advanced bookings for this naval and air pageant. For obvious reasons, the number of correspondents who could be attached to the official Press party, with full transmission and transport facilities, was strictly limited. Most of us applied to go, but there had to be a fair allocation between British and Americans, with the agencies and broadcasters having preference over people like myself who represented a single newspaper.

We British correspondents were helped enormously, at this stage, by the work in the Rome Public Relations set-up of Major Nigel Dugdale, an old Etonian of the 17/21 Lancers. The tank action in North Africa which knocked him out and caused his transfer to P.R. was a stroke of luck for us. His personal charm was matched by his ceaseless activity on behalf of his temperamental charges. We, who were unlucky in the main draw, were offered enticing alternatives ranging from parachute drops to luxury naval cruises. The only difficulty—a serious one—was that those outside the official party, having no assured facilities, would have to return to Rome immediately after the first landings. I decided to take my chance with the Royal Navy and was eventually assigned by Lieutenant-Commander "Digger" Blore, of Naval Public Relations, to a landing craft. In due course we received our embarkation warnings and rushed precipitately southwards.

Naples, like a filthy sore on the lovely arms of the bay, was festering with excitement when we all arrived. As usual our headlong haste had been unnecessary and there were several days to wait. All the troops had been embarked, but the town swarmed with Army and naval officers. Time hung heavy on their hands, and the Americans seemed to have more difficulty in suppressing their excessive energy than

other nationalities. They could not wait to fight and, in the last resort, fought each other. I remember a wild night at the Naval Officers' Club, at which wine, and eventually blood, flowed freely.

On August 10, armed with the necessary authority, I made my way to landing craft LCH 315 in the harbour and presented myself to the R.N.V.R. captain, Lieutenant John Heaton, a Cheshire man. He was one of those amateur sailors to whom the war-time Navy owed so much, having been in eleven operations, including Sicily, Salerno, and Anzio. His craft was a headquarters ship, a floating signal station, U.S. built, and her crew of seventy had cramped quarters. All the Navy's traditions of courtesy and hospitality to guests were as finely upheld in this little craft as in the mightiest battleship. There were four passengers altogether—Oulds, a naval photographer; McWilliams, a South African naval observer; Norman Fisher, a newsreel photographer; besides myself. There could be no doubt that we must have inconvenienced the Captain and added to his anxieties, but no one would have supposed so from his cordial manner. We were allotted bunks that lined the wall of the small wardroom in tiers of three. Sweat poured off us as we sat or lay about in this steel oven, longing to be fanned by the ocean breezes.

We could not sleep much in this Black Hole of Calcutta. Next morning, as we breakfasted luxuriously on bacon and tomatoes, the Captain gave us the welcome news that we would move at ten. McWilliams and I went ashore to get some fruit and also sought inspiration on the eve of our sailing by visiting the great banqueting hall of Castel Nuovo where Nelson had dined so often. Now it was used as a naval stores, but we peopled it, in our imagination, with a brilliant company and felt better for our visit, as if we had absorbed a tiny part of Nelson's own indomitable spirit.

Our radio was appropriately playing "Marche de Lorraine" as we moved slowly out of the harbour, thrilled in our Nordic blood at the tang of the sea, and the gallant spectacle of many ships in motion. I felt a little extra stab of excitement as an American escort cruiser, facetiously

described as "cabhorse" class, came plunging and cutting across our bows. We passed numerous Liberty ships, their rails lined with American troops, here and there an ebony face standing out among the whites. Other ships were packed with tanks, transport of all descriptions, trucks, jeeps, staff cars. Once more we marvelled at the paraphernalia, the complex organisation and all the immense misdirected effort of modern war.

We passed the high bruised cliffs of Capri, and as clouds obscured the sun I found it less alluring than in the pages of Axel Munthe or Robert Graves. The "buzz" spread round the ship that we were bound for Salerno to rendezvous with other landing craft, and—a big fillip this—that Churchill was in Naples and would inspect the invasion fleet.

In five hours we were off Salerno and I counted ninety landing craft at anchor. We swam off the ship to fill in time; there were chairs and mattresses on deck, as if we were bound on a pleasure cruise. Then came a spoilsport signal from the shore: "Heavy weather expected. Take suitable precautions." This was calamitous news for a poor sailor like me.

Red and white check-flags were fluttering from the ships of our miniature navy early next morning. Just before eight we set sail once again at the rear of a convoy of about thirty tank-landing craft, steaming in three lines across a cobalt and emerald sea. At lunch-time we were back in Naples Bay, mystified by our own comings and goings, dumbly admiring the international armada assembled—French, British, American, Norwegian, Italian—from massive battle wagons, cruisers and destroyers to troop transports and supply ships of all types. We saw nothing of Mr. Churchill's inspection but later heard that he had wished us "Good luck and good hunting." The weather was torrid. We stripped to the waist and soon began to look the colour of Red Indians.

Then at eight o'clock that evening we were off again

Mussolini gave his stab in the back we were about to give Adolf a kick in the soft under-belly.

The bad weather did not arrive. There was no sign of opposition, though there were a few false alarms and yellow warnings to uphold the belief that we were going to war. Generally speaking, the Spithead review atmosphere continued until, as we neared the French coast on the moonless night of August 15, there was an abrupt change of mood. I stood on deck, all gooseflesh, at 3.30 a.m. gripped with a cold expectancy that had switchback elements of fear. We were at concert tension, all the party spirit dowsed in the oppressive silence of pre-dawn. Our engine had stopped and there were winking red and green lights close at hand. Somebody whispered the explanation that they were morseing Abel, Baker, Charlie, indicating the limits of the transport area.

I could make out the dim shapes of other vessels. Surely the enemy could see all this. Why didn't they open fire? The unearthly silence continued. We could not discern the outline of the shore but knew that we were lying somewhere off St. Raphael, where Napoleon landed and departed on two ignominious occasions—his return from Egypt and his departure for St. Elba.

Time dragged on, in the chill eternity of the small hours. Would nothing stir? We were bored and dispirited, yet dreaded a sudden outburst of unbearable noise. At 4.30 our straining ears heard a distant hum that gradually swelled to the diapason of many aircraft overhead. The airborne boys were going in, and our hearts went with them, as we gnawed our lips in useless, ignorant anxiety. Yes, it was my ignorance that I found so exasperating, ignorance of what was really happening, plus the knowledge that, even if I knew, I could not report it, having no means of communication.

A few star-shells scratched the velvet drop-curtain. We heard some dull booms. That was all. It was days before we discovered that the airborne landings had been made without any opposition and almost without casualties, except in smashed gliders. The enemy had forced local farmers and labourers to stud their fields with posts to stop glider land-

in most cases were simply knocked flat, without completely wrecking the gliders. One American correspondent, Dick Mowrer, of the *Chicago Daily News*, did a marvellous journalistic job. He parachuted down somewhere near St Raphael, procured an air lift back to Rome and was able to cable a full story to his paper the same day. Mowrer beat me handsomely, for it also appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* by arrangement.

As the sky greyed into dawn we saw, at last, the cliffs of the Côte d'Azur dotted with its luxurious villas. Glasse disclosed agitated occupants here and there leaving hurriedly in night attire. Inland rose the massif of the Esteril Hills. All around us, as far as the eye could see, the plain of the Mediterranean was covered with transports, landing craft and warships. Greedily drinking in that wonderful scene, I reflected that the memory of this spectacle would compensate for all disappointments and difficulties.

The enduring mystery was the enemy's apparent lack of interest. On board, during the voyage, we had been given impressive details of the strength of his defences along the twenty miles of beach that was to be assaulted. They included all kinds of objectionable impedimenta and obstructions, from mines and under-water obstacles to impregnable pillboxes and formidable casements. Only one thing was lacking, namely the will to defend this coast, and of that we had no advance knowledge. Most of the troops who were supposed to be holding these beaches were, in fact, Russians or Poles who had been captured on the Eastern front and, deeming discretion the better part, had changed sides and uniforms. They had little fight in them.

As the dawn brightened we heard more rumblings and saw flashes inland, but there was still no firing from the shore. Half a mile to seaward lay the great U.S. battleship *Arkansas* with her guns reared for action. We saw them red-throated and their thunder rolled across the water. Other, more distant warships joined in, and we watched, in perfect safety, the terror and waste of a gigantic naval bombardment.

But these lumbering monsters were old-fashioned. Presently amid the storm of sound we heard a thumping

drum-fire of savage intensity. "What the devil's that?" I asked an officer.

"Rocket ships," he said tersely. "Look, there's one of them." A craft, low in the water and about our size, passed us with bank upon bank of rocket projectors on its deck, the latest plaything of civilised man.

A distinguished scientist recently told me that he inspected the German defences in Normandy after our rocket bombardment and found only slight damage. I saw little evidence of damage on the Riviera from them, but they certainly look and sound terrifying in action.

I am reminded of the Duke of Wellington. Whatever the enemy may think of them, by God they frightened me.

Small landing craft, packed with Americans sitting tense and glum, now passed us in line heading for the shore. A gentle swell had developed, and it washed alongside masses of pamphlets, addressed to the French people but accidentally delivered to Father Neptune. A fog of smoke was half obscuring the rising sun. The bombardment continued, in desultory fashion, but we could not see any of the shells landing. Presumably it was an inland barrage to prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements.

Signals began to arrive revealing the progress of the landings. It appeared that our sector was the most southerly. The first reports said: "Two waves touched down on time. Little opposition. Right flank of beach heavily mined." By ten o'clock, when the sea had subsided to a flat calm and shone with a metallic lustre in the brilliant sunshine, we received another signal: "All landings going very well; light resistance."

I was chafing with impatience and frustration, and also felt a sense of shame at the sight of those sinuous processions of landing craft. One of them, returning empty, flashed a signal to us: "Got ashore O.K. but heavy machine-gunning"—a somewhat different story. What was my usefulness if I could not send any news back, I wondered? Another landing craft glided past, with two corpses on its deck and some wounded, bound for a hospital ship. Yet another one, returning empty from the shore, came alongside for some unexplained reason. We were invited to go aboard and help



ourselves to discarded blankets, lifebelts and kit of all descriptions.

How little these things mattered. Just so much more junk to be carted about on your back.

Heaton sympathised with our impatience and at noon signalled to the U.S. flagship, the *Bayfield*, asking if means of putting us ashore could be provided. Always exceptionally co-operative in such matters, the Americans agreed to send over a small landing craft, known as an L.C.V.P., after lunch. Our spirits rose as it bounced towards us, early in the afternoon, and the publicity team—McWilliams, Oulds, Norman Fisher and I—hopefully embarked.

We gathered that the coxswain had instructions not to take needless risks. Kind as the Americans were, I think they were more concerned about the possible loss of an irreplaceable landing craft than about the fate of the British writers and photographers. Oulds, as the senior British naval officer with us, was in command, and his own special job was to take pictures for the Admiralty. The swell continued, and as we bounded forward the foam and spray added zest to our mission. We were to set foot in France again. Some of the French officers, we heard, had kissed the gritty beach and wetted it with their tears. We phlegmatic Anglo-Saxons intended no such demonstration, but anticipated our thrill with quiet inward satisfaction.

Then, suddenly, an unusual sight broke in upon these mental rhapsodies. It was a water-spout. At least I thought it was a water-spout until a muffled boom followed it, suggesting to my unwilling ears that it was a shell exploding. Another column of water lifted ahead of us, then another, a little nearer. The awful truth dawned upon us that some misguided Hun ashore was firing at us. It was extraordinary that along twenty miles of practically undefended beach we had to choose the one spot where we were positively unwelcome.

The shell-bursts were some hundreds of yards away, but Oulds, remembering his instructions, asked me whether I thought we should turn round. I thought that, without holding a round-table conference, we might take that praiseworthy decision, and orders were accordingly given to

the coxswain. Just as we had begun to swing about in a wide, foaming circle, I was dimly aware of a heated protest.

It came from Fisher, who had his film camera out, and was intently taking pictures of the shell-bursts.

"Who told this chap to turn round?" he demanded angrily. Oulds and I blushed and said that we did, and I added that I could describe the shell-bursts remarkably well from a more respectful distance. Fisher was hotly indignant, so we reluctantly reversed direction and approached the erupting columns of water again. The trouble with photographers is that they have to be unpleasantly close for their action pictures. However, even Fisher was satisfied in the end and we sheered away, to course aimlessly among the shipping for a while. Small motor craft were tearing forward now, laying a thick white smoke-screen. In the artificial fog we saw a huge tricolour hanging limply from the stern of the French battle cruiser *Emile Bertin*, a symbol of France reborn but still enfeebled. We recognised the British war-ships *Ramillies*, *Orion* and *Dido*.

Disconsolately, we returned to the *Bayfield* and were advised that we had better wait till the following morning. We were fretful and felt that the regatta was ending in anticlimax. I swore that I would never again be separated from my communications.

That evening the most violent incident of the whole invasion occurred. A solitary German reconnaissance plane came over at an immense height. Just previously I had been trying to count the number of ships in sight and made it something over a hundred. Many hundreds of bored anti-aircraft gunners were, therefore, hanging about waiting for this moment. They all let fly almost simultaneously. The sky was obliterated with black and white puffballs and red tracer streaked up from all directions, slicing the air into pyrotechnic patterns. The noise was prodigious, but accomplished nothing that I could see. Shortly afterwards, there was a huge explosion, and two landing craft on Green beach could be seen blazing furiously, their ammunition spouting and exploding. It was said that they had been hit by a glider bomb. They continued to burn all night, floodlighting the sky and sea with an angry glow. Pinewoods

at the back caught fire and the sweet perfume drifted to us.

Next morning we had an unopposed landing on a sandy beach where bulldozers were busy at mysterious tasks. Mulberry artificial harbours were used or needed on the invasion. Ten Liberty ships were lying close in-shore with troops and stores ashore in landing-craft processions. Gutted wrecks of the two burnt craft lay beached and blackened.

Memory plays curious tricks. This scene which showed printed indelibly on my mind is extremely vague. There were low cliffs, and on some rising ground to our right a small castle of doubtful antiquity. A more recent fort, of concrete, had been taken without much trouble. We were told that it fired exactly thirteen shots before its occupants fled in panic. I suppose somebody must have counted the enemy's cartridge cases. The pine-wood, still smouldering, had apparently been set on fire by a flame-thrower, though for what purpose this charming weapon had been used was obvious.

The Americans, who wore armbands with Stars and Stripes on them, had got a few guns ashore and what was described as "a beautiful ammunition dump." There was a great insistence on the beauty of this growing dun landscape. I stared at it and reflected that beauty is, indeed, in the eye of the beholder.

I encountered an Italian forced labourer, too dazed to be glad or sorry—the first member that I had met of that vast army of unhappy "displaced persons." A little way inland there was a road and a railway line, both in good condition. Even the telegraph poles and lines were intact, a surprising sight for one from Italy. It is curious that I cannot exactly pin-point this landing-place. I only know that it was somewhere between St. Raphael and Cannes, near Drammont.

Hundreds of prisoners, some of them barefooted and some of them in dirty ragged uniforms, came slouching dispiritedly along the road. Many of them had Mongolian features. They were guarded by half a dozen Maquis armed with German pistols, daggers or British tommy-guns and making the most of the theatrical possibilities. The sight of them told me

the war in Europe was as good as over. I little dreamed that it would drag on for another eight months.

. . . . .

From the professional point of view the next few days were a disaster. We tried vainly to contact the headquarters ship which had brought the main Seventh Army Press party, with the transmitter and censors. We four were transferred from one ship to another in this exasperating hunt. Eventually we decided to make the best of a bad job and get back to Rome. I hoped to write a feature story of the landings, as I had obviously been completely outstripped by colleagues on the news coverage. I added another vow to the one about communications, namely that I would never again consent to go on the fringe of operations, the lunatic fringe. If I could not go in the official party, said I, I would not go at all. Nevertheless, I put aside all these vows shortly afterwards when I went to Greece, and completely reversed the experience in the South of France.

On our extraordinary return journey to Corsica we were in seven different vessels altogether. They were two American submarine chasers, one British and one American landing craft, one American destroyer, one British motor launch, and an American air-rescue ship.

The calm sea made the transfer from one to another extremely easy and the various captains were uniformly courteous and helpful. Our most dramatic change was when the U.S. air-rescue speedboat overtook the British launch at a speed of twenty-five knots and stopped for exactly thirty seconds while we flung our kit on board and our bodies after it. By great good luck, no one fell in the sea.

After this happy informality we were reduced to impotent teeth-gnashing when a tangle of red-tape began to wrap itself round us in Corsica. We flew from Calvi to Bastia, where a British Army captain went frigid with horror when he discovered that we had no movement order. I offered to write one out for myself, but he merely looked annoyed.

We tramped about from one office to another, trying to find somebody who would write out a plausible-looking document, and eventually succeeded. Then, after a truck

breakdown in a thunderstorm, an eight-hours wait at two airfields for aircraft which failed to arrive, we were at last flown back to Rome in an American transport, the pilot of which did not care two cents whether we had a movement order or not. Our unmistakable British accents were good enough for him as passports. Of the "day-trippers" to the Riviera, I was the last to return to Rome. Nevertheless, I did succeed in writing a leader-page descriptive article which, filling in a good deal of background to the news stories, was approved and published.

Only a few days later I returned to Southern France as an officially accredited correspondent, now entitled to use the full facilities of the Public Relations set-up, including transport, censorship and transmission. Though the difficulties in this bizarre campaign were immense, there was inexpressible relief in the knowledge that one had only to hand in a story, as one posted a letter, and there responsibility ended.

The front was everywhere and nowhere. Sporadic fighting was going on simultaneously in many widely separated places. When I arrived the Germans were still hanging on in fortress positions in Marseilles and Toulon, while, with scattered rearguard actions, the demoralised remnants of General Blaskowitz's Nineteenth Army retreated up the river valleys.

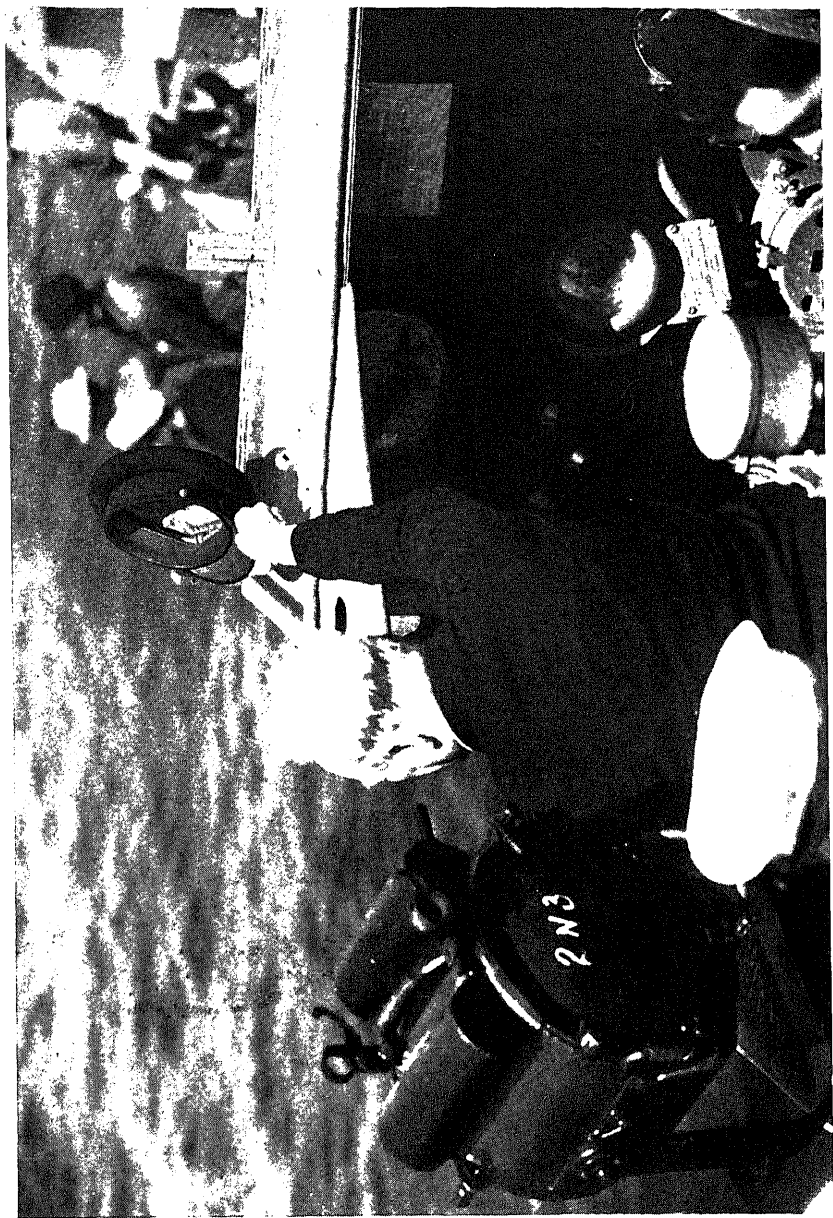
The Americans excelled at this sort of campaign which involved rapid exploitation in headlong dashes. One armoured Task Force, ripping off into the "blue," was stopped only by the Swiss frontier. Philip Jordan, among the lucky correspondents who had attached themselves to it, had a fine story. Generally speaking, the Germans, and their reluctant Eastern allies, had only one main object, namely to surrender to disciplined troops, preferably the Americans. This was understandable. The Maquis, swarming out of their hiding-places, were everywhere, thirsting for blood and vengeance. They looked like comic-opera bandits, but, armed with the tommy-guns with which we had so liberally supplied them, were murderously dangerous. Most of their



"Viva gli Inglesi." Rome celebrates, June 6, 1944.



"Zito Jellicoe." Entering Athens, Oct. 16, 1944.



"Good luck." Mr. Churchill watches Riviera invasion from  
H.M.S. Kimberley.

spleen was directed against those fellow-countrymen who had collaborated with the Germans.

Lynch law, and worse, prevailed in many of the towns which General Patch's army liberated. The Milice, German organised French Militia, were treated with a ferocity which came as a startling shock to us who had not had first-hand experience of the unspeakable Gestapo cruelties.

One of the difficulties of the Press correspondents was shortage of transport; another, a petrol famine which presently began to paralyse the whole campaign. We found ourselves, at times, piled seven or eight together in a clumsy type of vehicle known as a weapon carrier. As there were tempting possibilities at every point of the compass, and the reporters were all individualists—each with his own idea of what his particular organisation wanted—these parties sometimes became as harmonious as the United Nations.

Later on, however, Best arrived on the scene and commandeered a motor-car, which, by the strangest chance, belonged to an English friend of his and had been left in Cannes at the beginning of the war. There it was, in the garage, still intact and in working order. I am at a loss to understand why it had not been commandeered before, but then, as the Dutch are reputed to have hidden a complete ocean liner from the Germans for the whole duration of the war, perhaps it is not so remarkable.

Thereafter, Best and I began to motor about the unbroken asphalt roads like gentlemen. One anxiety was that the tyres were not very good. We set off one day from Grenoble, heading for a garage in Aix where Best believed he could get some more reasonable tyres. We were bowling along a mountain road when suddenly I yelled: "Stop." A round object was lying in the middle of the road. We jumped out and—it was a brand-new tyre of the correct size. I no longer refuse to believe in miracles.

Whenever the campaign seemed safest it suddenly became acutely dangerous. We were motoring into Cannes, and when we came to a little river a mile or two from the town the jeep in front of us ran over a mine and blew up. We were running along a peaceful road into Besançon when a



German self-propelled gun, apparently unaware that it had been left far behind, suddenly opened fire on us. Fortunately its marksmanship was bad. On the outskirts of the same city, with Maurice Watts, of Kemsley Newspapers, I climbed a hill in the track of an American patrol. We lost sight of the khaki uniforms flitting among the trees, all firing had died away. No traffic noises disturbed the sylvan quiet and the river Isere flowed in its course below. It became a country walk for us, though we were not too sure where we were going.

Suddenly, in a little clearing, we came across a ghastly waxwork. A German soldier was sprawling on his back. He had been hit full in the belly by a missile of some sort. All his intestines were exposed and spilling out. It was a sickening sight. Watts wanted to go on with our reconnaissance, but I, supposed to be the more experienced campaigner, opposed him. As we struggled downhill again I reconstructed the scene. I did not know what weapon had caused that terrible wound, but there were burnt patches on the grass all round showing that this lonely soldier had stuck to his ground. Was it a memorial to man's courage and sense of duty? Or to the fear of some brutal N.C.O. which made him choose what seemed the lesser of two evils? We did not know, but, as far as I was concerned, my own sense of self-preservation was, for the moment, uppermost.

Extracts from my Southern France despatches show a blend of exaltation and despair. "A superman with a magic carpet is needed to cover this bewildering, variegated scene. . . . Trying to follow the track of war is like being on a paper chase where the hares are economising with scent." Almost everybody had a story of some sort, but we were never quite sure whom to trust. Guides rushed forward eagerly, usually reminding me of those well-meaning pedestrians who give unauthorised signals to motorists.

Much of the time I had as conducting officer Captain Mike Davis, of the London Irish, who was easily the most picturesque and the handsomest of his mixed community. His dark green caubeen with its blue hackle attracted universal admiration and increased the raptures of the local population. Added to this, he had jet-black hair, dark

dreamy eyes, and a dazzling smile. The effect on women was devastating.

His self-confidence was enormous, but I did not always share it. On the road to Toulon, at the little village of Sollies Toucas, we were taken in charge by a charming brunette of about twenty who had ridden down from a mountain farm and, to protect her honour, carried a tiny pistol in the pocket of her white riding breeches. She offered to guide our party of correspondents to her mother's farm, where, she said, they would cook our canned rations.

The situation was extremely confused. German soldiers were wandering everywhere trying to give themselves up or to escape. From Toulon, where the remnants of the garrison were still defending themselves, came the rumble of gunfire. As we began to climb up a lonely mountain road, passing through dozens of ideal ambush positions, I did not relish it a bit. Mike Davis, flourishing his tommy-gun in a protective gesture, accidentally fired a shot and we all nearly fell out of the jeep with fright.

However, it turned out that Mike's confidence was justified. I was moved almost to tears by the mother's story. She was a bed-ridden invalid and asked to see one of us. When I entered the bedroom she looked like a dying woman, but her face lighted as she offered an emaciated hand. She had sheltered four British airman. The Germans took her sixty-year-old husband and shot him for it.

In complete contrast was the encounter which I had on the beach at Cannes with a dark young man, who professed to be English, and who certainly sounded like it. He said that he had been there all through the war, in a bank. When I met him he was engaged in his usual occupation—sun-bathing. Of course, he may have been a British agent or just an ingenious slacker, I would not know.

Marseilles, when we entered in the wake of victorious French troops, had put back the clock 150 years to the days of Rouget de Lisle. Tricolours floated from street-barricades. Civilians, with any arms they could lay hands on and tricolour armbands, were wandering round trigger happy. French women volunteers with cockades and pistols leapt on to our jeeps to guide us to headquarters. The Germans

were then still holding waterfront positions and the two forts of Notre Dame de Lagarde and Saint Jean. There was also guerrilla war in the streets between the Maquis and Milice, with indiscriminate shooting.

History and our own experience tend to exaggerate the warlike propensities and the bravery of man. I remember best the exuberant, bloodthirsty swashbucklers, but searching memory I also recall that in Marseilles we passed through silent street after silent street, where anxious, fearful faces peered from behind the shuttered windows. The faces of fathers, mothers, children. The faces of ordinary decent people who craved nothing but peace, yet found themselves swept into murder and chaos by elemental forces beyond their control or understanding.

If we stopped our jeeps they poured out joyously, because, I believe, they knew that our uniforms meant peace, justice, security and order. But I am not overlooking the effect of Mike Davis and his London Irish headgear, which added an imponderable factor.

Late in August the Press camp had been obliged to emulate the humble amoeba, the lowest form of animal life, and split in two. One part was somewhere near Aix and the other near Grenoble. I was at that time teamed with Maurice Watts, and the idea occurred to us that we might "slip round the back," through Maquis country, to Paris. Mike Davis, taken into our confidence, fell in with the idea with marked enthusiasm. We were at Grenoble, but planned to use the camp near Aix as starting-base. On arrival there, Mike began preparing industriously for the adventure. The two chief difficulties were going to be petrol and provisions.

Mike began to load up the trailer with innumerable packets of sugar and coffee, while I looked on with mild surprise. "Aren't you going to take anything solid?" I inquired.

"Oh, we'll make do," said Mike mysteriously. Actually he was proposing to "live on the country" and intended that we should ingratiate ourselves with gifts of the commodities likely to be in shortest supply. Alas, for this masterly scheme, an American Public Relations officer came forward and said, very politely, that he thought we were

taking rather too much sugar and coffee. So, feeling like guilty schoolboys, we disgorged, in favour of something more stodgy and solid.

Shortage of supplies, it seemed, particularly petrol, might jeopardise the whole scheme, but we thought that, at any rate, we might make a reconnaissance across the Rhone. We motored without incident to Avignon, and then turned south again to find a ferry, which, we were told, was taking the vehicles of a French armoured division to the other bank. Vehicles were waiting in a long line, but, once again, the feathered head-dress worked miracles and we were passed to the head of the queue. I felt no shame at taking priority in this way. Maximum mobility is essential to a war correspondent; without it he might as well pack up, for he is like a soldier without a gun.

On the other side of the Rhone we were plunged instantly into an hysterical new world in which one form of order had collapsed and had not yet been replaced by another. The disciplined French troops were following the river valley northwards; all the country to the west was in the hands of the Maquis. Before the jeep was disembarked I stepped ashore and was swept into a whirlpool of French resistance men, all waving Sten guns, gesticulating and jabbering simultaneously. We were heading for Nimes. Vainly protesting, I was led, almost forcibly, to a ramshackle motor-car. Mike followed. We managed to shout to Watts that we would rendezvous somewhere in Nimes. He was to stick to the jeep and bring the baggage.

As we rattled and bumped along I noticed, with distinct misgivings, that our driver was wearing a German uniform. In French, and broken English, our other companions explained that he was "all right"; he was a Pole, conscripted into the German Army after being taken prisoner, and he had now come back to the right side again. We entered Nimes, amid the scenes of wild jubilation now so familiar, and went to a café for a meal. I began to wish we had made a more satisfactory arrangement to meet Watts, for I was becoming slightly anxious about the baggage.

Actually Watts, enjoying the unaccustomed thrill of "liberating" a few villages slightly off the main road, was

being flower-decked and lionised. He was even made to make brave attempts to answer the speeches of welcome. Knowing this, I suggested that we should hunt for him in Nîmes. We drove through the crowded, delirious, and beflagged streets in the direction of the Roman amphi-theatre, which seemed as central a point as any.

My Baedeker had said a good deal about the Roman remains in Nîmes. The arena, though smaller than the Colosseum in Rome, was in a better state of preservation, he told me. Bullfights took place there in pre-war days. It could seat 20,000 spectators. I noted casually that the guide-book also said: "The reaction of 1815 was attended by still bloodier reprisals than at Toulouse, Avignon, or Marseilles."

As we neared the place I heard a fusillade of shots, and, still worrying about the baggage, I dismissed it as a *feu d'artifice*. But now the crowd was so dense and so tumultuous that we could not drive an inch farther. It suddenly occurred to me that this must be Watts, being acclaimed by the whole populace. I dragged open the car door and struggled to get out, mobbed by near-demented people of both sexes. I was half-dragged, half-pushed through the press.

The crowd fell apart. A little unshaven man, who even in that feverish moment struck me as resembling the mortician at West Ham, rushed at me and rubbed his cheek on mine in a slobbering kiss. He dragged me by the hand towards the wall of the arena, stooped and then picked up a sagging, bleeding corpse by the other hand and held the sightless head in my face.

"*Il a pappé, monsieur. Il a pappé,*" he screamed.

We had stumbled upon a summary execution of the Milice. The corpses lay in a row and it was horrible. I turned away in deep disgust. I did not know what unmentionable crimes these men had committed, but the manner of their end revolted me. Somehow, from that moment, I lost all enthusiasm for our projected trip to Paris.

We found Watts, with our baggage and provisions, and we spent the night with an hospitable French family. I fancy, welcomed us the more eagerly because they

that our British uniforms might offer protection from lawless elements. On the following morning we had another conference on the Paris question. Watts and I decided that, considering the uncertainties over petrol and provisions and the fact that we should be leaving the Southern French front uncovered, we had best abandon the idea.

## GREEK BUCKETEER

ETERNALLY, it seemed, one came back to Rome, and to the eyrie in the Via Sistina. The fluid front in Southern France was disappearing as the allied armies joined to form a continuous moving line from the Channel to the Swiss frontier. *The Daily Telegraph* already had several correspondents with the British and American forces in France and I thought it better to return to Italy. Those who moved the pawns about in London agreed, and I flew back from Lyons.

Public Relations had moved into a large barrack-like building, and I entered upon another period of corresponding as a base-wallah, at a long distance from the front. The performance in the Press room would have caused any sane visiting outsider some surprise and perhaps amusement. There was a little square hole in one wall through which copy was handed to the censor, who, after coping with it, passed it on to the transmitting room.

The agency men, or women, manœuvred their tables close as possible to this aperture. Every morning, at an uncertain time, Nigel Dugdale, with a beaming smile, would come in with a pile of stencilled papers. These were copies of the day's bulletin with the intelligence summaries attached. "Come and get it," said Nigel. The agency wallahs would make a wild rush to "get it," dash back to their typewriters, rattle off a few sentences and then in a scramble to be the first to push the copy through the hole in the wall. If one gained a beat of a minute over rivals it made the day for him.

Fortunately, I was not so anxious about minutes. My problem was to put flesh on the bare bones of the bulletins and the intelligence reports.

There were huge maps on the walls and we used to search them minutely, trying to find the various places mentioned, while, with a ruler, we decided that the Americans were now so many miles from Bologna or wherever it was.

This would have been a fairly simple day's work but for the fact that new worries entered our lives. Colonel Astley, the British Public Relations chief, was—in the course of his duties—constantly offering us mystery missions, being unable, for security reasons, to explain exactly what they were. We, on our side, could not ask the office what to do about it because (a) we did not know precisely what each project was, and (b) censorship did not allow us to discuss such matters by cable or letter.

On one occasion, I remember, Colonel Astley did make a clean breast of it and told us that the mission he was offering was to drop by parachute behind the Italian lines to spend some time with British-aided partisans. The word "parachute" recurred with ominously increasing frequency in our lives. Sitting on their untidy trestle tables, in an attentive circle round him, the correspondents seemed a little cold about this project. There was a painful silence.

"Come," said the Colonel genially. "I'm told that parachuting is very safe and simple nowadays."

"Yup," drawled an elderly American. "Only one thing can go wrong."

Some of these missions were concerned with small operations among the Dalmatian islands and in Albania conducted by a formation known as Land Forces (Adriatic). I was uneasily conscious that one of these days an enterprising unit attached to Land Forces (Adriatic) might do something spectacular. On the other hand, after my experience in Leros, and with recollections of Elba, I had become somewhat allergic to islands.

An operation given the weird code name of "Towanbucket" was being hawked around among the correspondents at this time. As usual, we could not discover precisely what it was all about. I began to entertain suspicions, however, that it might be concerned with a landing in Greece. That would obviously be a good story, but I knew that the official force for the liberation of Greece was to come from the Middle



East and that our correspondent Richard Capell, who had unluckily been pinned down in Cairo while I had been having all the fun, was due to accompany it. I therefore felt very hesitant about "muscling in" on a Greek expedition, however small and unimportant it might be.

What the devil *was* "Towanbucket"? After much patient secret service work, I found that one suggestion was a march by a battalion of the Highland Light Infantry to the pass of Thermopylae, with the vague idea of cutting off the German retreat and creating an historical parallel, in reverse, to the feat of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans. For some inexplicable reason everybody thought I was just the man to march with the gallant Highlanders on this crackbrained expedition. Thermopylae's sepulchral strait did not appeal to me in the least, yet somehow "Towanbucket" began to exercise the hypnotic influence of a snake over a rabbit.

Nigel Dugdale, as usual, was immensely helpful and encouraging. When I volunteered for this unknown enterprise, with many other correspondents, there was the usual business of balloting for half a dozen places. I lost in the ballot, but, in some unexplained way, Nigel managed to wangle me into the party. Then, after all, it emerged that there was to be no march to Thermopylae, but something else.

Before we had our sailing orders a new and serious anxiety arose. Lucas, because of his accreditation to the R.A.F., had made separate arrangements, and suddenly left by air for an unknown destination. We suspected that he might be going to Greece, and getting in first.

After many alarms and excursions, false starts and false scents, the whole party of Army correspondents—myself among them, was dumped into a transit camp at Bari. I remember an infinitely sad moment there. One member of our party, a towering, quiet-spoken South African named Pieter Lessing, who represented the Exchange Telegraph agency, had been tenderly nursing a bottle of whisky ever since he left Rome. He intended to live on it for an indefinite period, no doubt occasionally doling it out to his friends. He refused to risk it in his baggage, and carried it about everywhere like a new-born baby.

Pieter had an immobile face and never raised his voice above pianissimo level. In the bare hotel that served as a transit camp he came to my room, impassive as ever, and made a gesture. I followed him eagerly, expecting a *chota peg*. Alas, on entering his room, for some unexplained reason, he let the bottle slip on to the stone floor. I stared mournfully at the oozing pool and the broken glass. Then he sat on the bed bowed under all the sorrows of the world, snuffing the scent of the spilled Scotch.

We were awaiting an air-lift from Bari to an airfield called Araxos in the north-west corner of the Peloponnese. Now bad weather held us up. We began to have some inkling of the plan of campaign. A small mixed force under the command of Major Earl Jellicoe, C.O. of the Special Boat Service, was being landed in the Peloponnese with strictly limited objectives. Its title was abbreviated to "Bucket Force." The main purpose, apparently, was to prevent the outbreak of civil war as the Germans, threatened by the Russian advance across their lines of communications in the Balkans, hurriedly withdrew.

Sixty officers and men of the Special Boat Service had been dropped at Araxos on September 22, under command of Major Ian Patterson, who was Jellicoe's second in command. It was a rushed decision. Patterson afterwards told me that he only received his orders at eight o'clock on the night before the jump. His men were 100 miles from Bari, and he had to get them to Brindisi to embark in the air transports. They landed without opposition. The R.A.F. had begun to send supplies and reinforcements of the R.A.F. Regiment, when bad weather grounded all aircraft, making Araxos airfield unusable.

Patterson's job was to soothe a highly inflammatory situation, and he did so by bluff. It was not merely the rivalry of the various Greek Andarte bands that caused him concern. The most dangerous element in Patras comprised 1,300 members of the Greek Security Police, a German-organised body roughly corresponding to the Milice in France. The Greek Andartes, emboldened by the signs of impending evacuation, had come down from their mountain hiding-places and were spoiling for a massacre.

With fifteen men, Major Patterson entered Patras under flag of truce, an interview with the German command having been arranged through the Swedish Red Cross. He saw the German second-in-command, a genial Korvettkapitan, who obviously wanted to bring the second world war to a speedy end as far as he was concerned. He had about 1,200 garrison troops under command, making with the Security Police a total force of 2,500.

Patterson knew that he could not possibly cope with this number of prisoners. He therefore made a threefold demand that the German commander should undertake (a) not to send out patrols, (b) not to blow up the harbour, and (c) not to allow any ships to leave. Failing compliance, said Patterson, he would attack, "with all his forces," at noon next day. The Korvettkapitan was evasive and said that he could not give a decision without consulting his superior officer. In actual fact he did observe all three conditions, and the Germans accelerated preparations for evacuation.

Meanwhile separate negotiations had been going on with the Security Police, conducted by an Australian, Captain Eric Grey. These misguided Greeks, who did not, it appeared, have the evil reputation of the Milice in France, were only too eager to surrender into the safe hands of the uniformed British troops. They poured out of Patras at night in their hundreds, yielding their arms to about thirty S.B.S. men. Elías Andartes, thirsting for blood, had advanced his outposts round the town, but, ordered to withdraw, did so without demur. The Germans, according to Patterson, were unaware of all this, till shortly before dawn the next morning when two armoured cars of the R.A.F. Regiment, delivered by sea, drove into the centre of the town and shot up some trucks on the general principle of "putting the wind up" the demoralised Hun.

That day Patterson, with his minute force, staged a realistic "full-scale" attack. The Andartes had produced an old Italian mortar with piles of ammunition and the R.A.F. Regiment supplied a three-inch British mortar. "Buck Force" plastered a position known as Wireless Hill with about five hundred mortar bombs. The Germans panicked

then bolted, leaving one gun in possession of the Bucketeers. The prospect of having some artillery was supremely tempting.

The Bucketeers paused to get the thing going, and, though there were no sights, did succeed in hurling a few shells after ships which were at that moment leaving Patras harbour, heading towards the Gulf of Corinth, with the last of the garrison troops on board.

Officers in older regiments were apt to sneer at the S.B.S. and call them "Boy Scouts." Admittedly their methods were sometimes theatrical and unconventional, but they were admirably suited to the temperament and traditions of the Greeks. The finest tribute one can pay is that their timely arrival saved bloodshed on what would have been a horrifying scale.

All the members of the S.B.S. were volunteers and only about ten per cent of those who applied to join were finally accepted. They were trained as parachutists, sailors and ski troops, and their name was a byword in the Aegean, the Adriatic and Yugoslavia. Up to the time of the Greek liberation they had participated in forty or fifty raids and landings. Envious eyes might see them as "Boy Scouts"; uninformed outsiders as descendants of Elizabethan buccaneers. In my experience both these conceptions were wrong. The S.B.S. troopers were individualists, and brave, enterprising fighters. They were unorthodox, yet well disciplined.

Waiting in Bari while all this was going on, we were fuming with frustration. We had one consolation, however. Lucas and an American reporter with him were equally impotent because their only means of communication was by air mail from Araxos to Bari. The great question was whether we should wait to go by air, when the weather cleared, or get on at once by sea. After several days of agonising uncertainty, three of us decided to take a chance and go by sea. It was an all Empire party—Lessing, the South African; Terence Southwell-Keeley, an Australian representing the *Sydney Telegraph*; and myself. Our conducting officer, who made arrangements for us to cross to the Peloponnese in a landing craft, was a suave and well-

a hair or made a remark out of place. By cruel luck, after he had survived all the adventures of our Greek expedition, he was killed accidentally by an explosion in Bari.

We four embarked in a landing craft which was laden with big six-wheeler trucks. There were one or two other passengers as well. As it was impossible for us all to crowd into the tiny single cabin, and also because I hated the fug, I explored the well of the ship for a suitable sleeping place. The trucks made wonderful covered wagons, as some R.E.M.E. troops on board had already discovered. Eventually I found a truck which had a jeep-trailer anchored down inside it. Moreover, the trailer had a canvas cover stretched over it which served very well as an improvised hammock. It was a rough and sickening trip. I spent most of the time lying flat on my back hoping that something would happen to put me out of my misery. When I raised bilious eyes I could see the superstructure in the stern tracing crazy patterns on the sky.

The R.E.M.E. men next door, with Southwell-Keeley as guest (henceforward referred to as S-K), did wonderful things like frying bacon. I was content to lie still, rocked in the cradle of the jeep.

We landed at Katakolon, a place of pallid colouring and deep poverty. The Germans had left over a month before, abruptly abandoning all the trenches and pillboxes in the hills and blowing up the mole. We had our first insight into the Greek tragedy of modern times, the inflation, the starvation, the black misery, and the murderous hate. Peasants dragged the useless currency about in sacks. There were already 40,000,000 drachmas to the shilling, but the figure increased every day. The money had little meaning and barter was the general practice, but roughly speaking a loaf was worth 40,000,000 drachmas.

The inhabitants of Katakolon were numbed with want and already accustomed to British uniforms. They gave us no inkling of the frenzied reception we were to receive later, which made our expedition seem like a crazy, interminable wedding procession. To be loved is the most glorious sensation in this world. It was our fortune to be loved by a

We had been warned in Bari that we could expect no transport to be "laid on" for our benefit. However, we were permitted to use some jeeps brought over in our landing craft to take us as far as Patras, where they had to be handed over to Lord Jellicoe. We passed through a number of shabby shack towns, and the incident I remember most clearly is when a small boy jumped on the running-board clad in the raggedest clothes I have ever seen on any human body. His coat and trousers were in ribbons; how they hung together at all was a profound mystery. No scarecrow in an English field ever wore such an outfit. I supposed it gave some warmth and it concealed his skin and bone. But his wizened, old, little face was radiant. To know that the sight of our khaki had brought such happiness to the child made everything seem worth while.

Savage, cold anger filled us at the sight of villages razed in German reprisals. Sometimes we stuck in the treacly mud of the primitive roads and had to find branches to give the spinning wheels a grip.

Once our conceit had a knock. Darkness had overtaken us. We did not know the way and were overjoyed to see twin tunnels bored by the lights of a jeep coming from the opposite direction. We expected a cordial greeting from our kind. Instead a British officer dismounted and in a brusque and mannerless fashion told us that he wanted one of our jeeps. He was one of those gallant liason officers who had parachuted into Greece during the German occupation to co-operate with the Andartes. He had no time for new boys, especially journalists. I suppose he was right to take the jeep, but his manner was high-handed and we gave it up with scant grace, crowding into another one behind us.

It was 2 a.m. when we entered the outskirts of Patras, a dead city of fear and deserted streets. We hammered on doors where chinks of light showed, but nobody dared to open. Ghostly flags floating overhead were the only indication that we were, in fact, in a freed town. We were in one of those periodical sloughs of doubt and depression, but our

chief anxiety was not where to lodge for the night. We wondered where Lucas was and whether he had scooped us.

The facts, then hidden from us, were that he had left that day by air, returning to Bari and Rome. Unwittingly the censor had been on our side, holding up all his copy for security reasons. When he arrived back in Italy, however, he and his American companion prevailed upon the censor to release it. So, on the story of the first landing in Greece and the liberation of Patras he beat us by a day. However, our turn was coming in this game of snakes and ladders across the European map.

As last we found a Greek captain of Andartes, wearing a uniform of his own invention and, as usual, dangerously armed. He, and a companion whose face and intentions were concealed behind a luxuriant black beard, proved most helpful. They found us beds in a bare hotel of narrow corridors, tiny rooms and precipitous stairways. The night porter kissed me passionately on the cheek, and then conducted me to a room heavily bug-ridden. S-K, whom I had regarded as a hardened campaigner, proved more sensitive to the bugs than I. He carried out enormous sweeps against them, and, even then, had a sleepless night.

I did nothing but go to sleep. The bugs marched about in their military formations all night and ignored me completely. I did not have a single bite in the morning.

On another occasion, I remember, we were sleeping in a peasant's cottage. I awoke early and noticed that S-K was missing. Somewhat alarmed, I searched about and found him lying on the stone floor of the verandah. I asked him why he had chosen such a hard bed. He stared at me sorrowfully and asked me to follow him. The mattress of his bed was swarming with bugs. So was mine, but, not noticing it, once again I went unbitten. There must be some great medical truth in this experience; perhaps it is connected with resinated wine we had been drinking. But then S-K had taken some, too.

. . . . .



Valour : Andartes Guard of Honour, Athens.

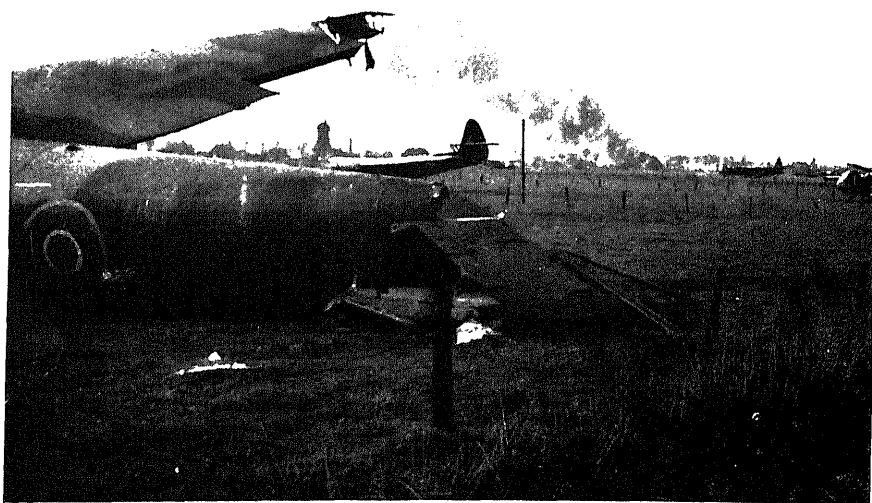


Beauty : Greek girls in national costumes.





Rhine Crossing, March, 1945. Exit from the glider.



Crashed glider near Haminkeln.

To my London-conditioned mind the atmosphere of Athens was inseparable from a Marx Brothers comedy—a comedy staged by the inhabitants of a mad-house and one in which somebody was liable to shoot the manager at any time. It was no comedy, really, but it was impossible to feel anything tragic about the situation or we should ourselves have exhausted our wits. There was little food, except what we had bought ourselves, but the town at least had its electricity and a somewhat variable water supply. Everything was higgledy-piggledy, including the time. Orders had been issued to make Greek time uniform with Italian; some tried, some did not. Our hotel asked me for 90,000,000 drachmas and took two English shillings with gratitude. With the help of the newspaper of the inflated Greek currency some British gold sovereigns were circulating, bearing Victoria's dignified image. These were some of the sovereigns dropped to the Andartes—the total was said to amount to more than 1,000,000. Some of them are used in Greece to this day, the most stable factor in the currency, though at the time of our arrival they were an irresistible temptation to bucketeers, who knew that, in Rome, they could get at least eight paper pounds for one sovereign.

Kanelopoulos, the Minister of Reconstruction, who had been landed secretly by destroyer, came to harangue the half-hysterical crowds from the balcony of the Elas headquarters. (Elas, at this time, was by far the most active and longest of the Andartes fighting organisations.) I remember that standing beside him was a burly stage bandit, with an enormous shaggy black beard that would have sent Mr. Clarkson into raptures. His mop of hair was half-concealed under an astrakhan cap. Every detail of his outfit was studied. A bandolier and a Sam Browne crossed on his massive chest. He had somehow acquired a light-coloured khaki uniform and breeches, with top-boots. In his belt was a pistol and a German knife with a long white handle. His smooth olive features and grave brown eyes lighting with amusement hardly matched his outfit. They should have belonged to a priest, or, perhaps, had the beard been white, to Father Christmas in a London store.

This was the ferocious guerrilla fighter who hid his

identity under the name of Aris (God of War) Veloukhiotis. His real name was Athanese Klaras and his reputation was villainous. If his politics could be analysed, he was a left-wing Republican with Communist sympathies, but eventually even the Communists repudiated him. Stories circulated that Aris had committed all kinds of unmentionable crimes, that he was a sadist and had ordered wholesale massacres. My colleague Richard Capell met men who swore that Klaras had had prisoners' feet beaten and then salted. Certainly he had a criminal record from 1925 onwards, having been convicted of a variety of crimes, including theft, perjury, and forgery.

Kanelopoulos, who at that time was speaking from the same balcony, later denounced him as responsible for 10,000 Greek lives in the Peloponnese. Klaras was well-named the "witch-doctor" of the Greek resistance movement. Yet he came of respectable middle-class parents and had decided urbanity. He certainly also had enormous vanity and must have been obsessed with a fanatical belief in his own destiny to lead men, besides an insensate desire for personal power. After all, more famous men in other lands have had these same characteristics.

This posturing, picturesque cut-throat looked his best when riding on a chestnut horse at the head of his tatterdemalion forces. When I saw him leading his army, two buglers rode immediately behind him blowing querulously, their horses noticeably bonier than that of their leader. Then came a troop of about six men on horses and mules, comprising a sovereign's escort. The main body—shambling in column of threes—wore a miscellaneous assortment of German, Greek or Italian uniforms. A bandolier, alone, was the minimum, some wearing this over civilian rags. British Sten guns, dropped by parachute, were the most serviceable weapons they carried. Later, we were to rue the day when we so lavishly supplied these arms.

Bringing up the rear of this army, which was only a few hundred strong, were two horse-drawn carts, laden with captured German war material, as well as men with velvet berets, looking like Parisian artists. An officer, wearing his old Greek uniform—the only person whose clothing matched

from head to foot—sought vainly to keep his men in step by blowing on a whistle.

The Greeks adored processions, and as we progressed they grew ever longer, noisier and more fantastic. All Greece, it seemed to us, became one continuous roaring, flag-waving, banner-bearing procession. Everybody who could walk joined in; little girls in blue and white caps, singing happily, and small boys with German grenades strapped to their belts.

In Patras, that night, Klaras intoxicated the only too susceptible crowds with his oratory till they began to chant in orgiastic rhythm: "Aris, Aris." He could have incited them to any atrocities, I felt, but for the restraint of our khaki. When he had finished, amid a storm of cheers, I pushed my way into the Elas building to obtain an audience of the great man. Although he was said to be an Anglophobe he was genially expansive to me, after I had shoved my way into his presence through crowded corridors.

He told me that he was forty, was born in Roumeli and had formerly been a journalist. Klaras claimed to be the first man in Greece to become an Andarte against the Germans—in November 1941.

All the while the white-handled knife fascinated me. Finally, I asked him its history. He fondled it lovingly. "It was a German war gift," he said with a ghoulisn chuckle that implied a sticky end for its owner.

Klaras died in June of the following year in barbarous and slightly obscure circumstances. The one certainty is that his bearded head, severed from its body, was exposed on a pole in the main square at Trikhala in Thessaly, a charming survival of medieval custom. He had refused to hand over his arms in the agreement which ended the civil war in February of that year and, with 100 followers, took to the mountains again. At first it was said that he had been killed by the Greek National Guards, but later that he had taken his own life with a hand-grenade.

It is not easy to sift the precise truth about this man, surrounded with bloody legends. This much is plain: that he was one of those little Caesars whose conceit and craving for power cause such unmitigated misery in this world.

Many British officers with whom I spoke were contemptuous of the efforts of the Greek Andartes and compared them unfavourably with those of Tito and his partisans. Having no first-hand knowledge, it is hard for me to express an opinion, but it is obvious from the inhuman reprisals of the German occupation forces that the Andartes' activities must have worried them considerably. On the other hand, Klaras and his like seemed more intent on slaughtering fellow Greeks than harrying the enemy.

"Towanbucket" was supposed to end at Patras, but somehow it did not. Commandos and another squadron of S.B.S. had been landed in the island of Kythera at about the same time, with the object of clearing and reconnoitring the islands guarding the entrance to the Piraeus, thus preparing the way for the official party from Alexandria. The affair developed into an unofficial race to be first into Athens. British officers had, of course, entered Athens surreptitiously during the occupation, but the honour of being the first real "liberators" went, I believe, to a patrol of the S.B.S. under the command of one Lieutenant Balsillie, on October 12.

We correspondents, whose numbers had been swollen by the arrival of several Americans and Kenneth Matthews, of the B.B.C., were told that we could follow up Jellicoe's Bucketeers, but could not use Army transport and would have to make our own arrangements. As the Germans had collared all usable cars, this was a stunning blow. We had formed into two parties. Kenneth Matthews, who was an old Greek hand and spoke the language, joined forces with two Americans. Another American, Shan Sedgwick, of the *New York Times*, was the luckiest of all. Because of his knowledge of Greek and Greece he was frequently taken ahead by Jellicoe, Patterson, and others to act as an interpreter and guide.

A laughable thing happened about transport. Matthews and I both hit, independently, on the idea of appealing to all-powerful Elas to provide us with transport. Each was separately promised a car and we all thought that Providence had solved our problems. What we failed to realise was that there was only *one* car, and that a pitiful wreck.

When we all turned up at the appointed time and place we found ourselves involved in an undignified debate as to who were the rightful possessors of this battered relic.

It was most unfortunate, as the car was our last and only hope of keeping up with the Bucketeers, and, plainly, it could not take everybody. Eventually I suggested that we should draw lots. The car could, at an uncomfortable pinch, take four besides the driver, we thought. Then Matthews, suddenly and adamantly, decided that he would drop out. Nothing would shift him. As I had just been beaten by Lucas, I could do nothing but take advantage of his generosity and let the ballot proceed. Actually the difficulty then solved itself because the Americans, for reasons of their own—perhaps because they were less interested in an all-British operation than we were—also decided to drop out, and we were left in undisputed possession.

Thus began our incredible journey which ended seven days later when the wreck trundled into a delirious Athens, days before the arrival of the official liberators from Middle East. Sometimes it was a car, sometimes a gipsy caravan, sometimes a super sedan chair. It was a car so long as it could be persuaded to move along the road, preferably downhill. It was a caravan when we camped in it. It was a sedan chair when we stuck in the mud, or in a water-splash, or in a ditch, for then swarms of peasants would appear from nowhere and lift the whole contraption up with their muscular arms in one of the greatest feats of combined strength ever seen off the musical-hall stage.

The worst feature was the tyres. Eventually I became so disgusted with the constant hold-ups for puncture repairs that I hitch-hiked the lap over the mountains from Corinth to Megara. S-K and Lessing insisted upon clinging to the car. I said they would merely get stuck in the mountains, and I waited in a village outside Corinth all night till some of the R.A.F. armoured cars arrived.

Next morning I was riding in state on an armoured car when we passed the wreck on a mountain road that wound through fragrant pines. "How did you get on?" I shouted. "Oh, fine," said S-K evasively and obstinately. I discovered afterwards that, as I predicted, the tyres finally refused to

spending an uncomfortable night in the hills. However, it did not really make any difference. There was another pause in Megara, where we rejoined forces for the final dash into Athens.

But it was the people, not the tyres, that were the chief obstacle to our progress. At every village we were bombarded with rose-petals, fruit, flowers, grapes, and rice in such quantities that at some convenient spot we had to stop the car to empty it all out on the roadside again. It was no unusual thing for some excited peasant woman to come to the car window with a whole basketful of apples which she would pour into our laps in a thundering cascade.

In their ecstasy of joy, people in some places flung down carpets in the road for our car to run over, the first and only occasion on which I have ever had a red carpet rolled out for me. Oleander and laurel branches were strewn in our path. Banners floating overhead bore the legend "Welcome." On the walls amateur sign-writers painted in sprawling white letters "ZITO JELLICOE—ZITO BYRON."

At one village—Acrata—typical of many, people formed a cordon across the road and refused to let us pass until we had listened to five speeches of welcome. Two were given by village beauties, one by the mayor, one by the priest, and one by the local representative of Elas. Small boys rang the church bells furiously. The mayor presented us with an English version of his speech which began: "Our great allied heroes of the air, land, and sea, we greet you and we wish you a hearty welcome. It is not only that you have gained the universal war but you have gained the sympathy of the people of the whole world, especially the confidence and gratitude of the Greek people."

After that, I shall never be able to blush any more. I made a brief speech in English explaining, as tactfully as possible, that the reception had misfired and should have been reserved for Lord Jellicoe. Most of them did not understand me, those who did, did not believe me. Generally speaking, these speeches of welcome made most flattering comparisons with Pericles, Leonidas and (the original)

Alexander. Red-faced, be-spectacled, pot-bellied, slightly round-shouldered and at times distinctly worried-looking, I did not feel in the least like any of these gentlemen.

Byron was quoted in large chunks, and never more aptly.

*A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—  
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine.*

Truly eternal summer gilded the hills and islands of the Blest in those delirious days. Unhappily, they were all too short.

. . . . .

In Megara, it appeared that we were treading too closely on the heels of the retreating Germans. Jellicoe's force numbered only a few hundred and had no artillery. Allied Force Headquarters in Italy therefore had the idea that he should be reinforced immediately by airborne troops. The 2nd British Parachute Brigade, with glider-borne airfield construction equipment, was accordingly detailed to "seize and prepare airfields in the Athens area."

Apparently, it was not merely the correspondents who had difficulty in maintaining uninterrupted communications, for it seemed that A.F.H.Q. were under the impression that Megara airfield was still in German hands. On October 12 I was seated in a peasant's cottage writing a story in the optimistic hope that Gerald Boles would be able to get it back to Italy somehow, when somebody ran in with excited cries.

"They're dropping parachutists, British parachutists."

I rushed out to walk or run a mile or two down to the airfield, when a jeep came tearing up the hilly road. Lord Jellicoe was driving and, ignoring all rules, he stopped to give me a lift. On the way we heard bad news. A high wind was blowing and had dragged many of the parachutists across the field, into various obstructions and even into the sea, before they could get out of their harnesses. One trouble—in my opinion—was that, like all parachutists on operational drops, they were far too heavily burdened with equipment.

About two hundred men were dropped first, and there were no less than forty casualties, including two killed. Greek



cottages to tear up precious sheets for bandages, as medical facilities were woefully lacking. Canisters full of ammunition and mortar bombs had also been dropped. At this moment the German rearguard, which had placed two of their pestiferous self-propelled guns on hills overlooking the field, began to bombard it spasmodically. For the first time, our Peloponnese picnic began to look like a small war.

Jellicoe, seeing Lessing and me hanging about, ordered us to help load up some civilian lorries with the ammunition canisters. It was an unpleasant job and we did not relish it, but we did it for a time, till we felt that honour was satisfied. The shelling was what would be described as "light," but the prospect that, however aery-faery it might be, it could explode one of the canisters added too sporting an element to a campaign that had been singularly free from hazard up to that point.

Some of the correspondents had actually been on the airfield when the parachutists landed and did their utmost to save casualties by hanging on to the men as they were dragged by the wind. Lessing had his 6 feet 6 inches hoisted into the air but managed to bring his man down Rugby fashion.

Colonel H. B. Coxen, the commanding officer, was the most surprised man among the airborne arrivals. He thought they would have to fight for it, and was slightly disgusted to find that there were no less than eight non-combatant war correspondents in possession, on the spot. Colonel Coxen attributed his own immunity from injury partly to the fact that he wore no steel helmet. He told me that he had a theory the skull was built to take certain shocks, and the weight of the helmet was more a disadvantage than a protection.

He was a great wit and his men adored him. It was largely due to his advocacy of "the more khaki uniforms the better" that we war correspondents were allowed to accompany his airborne troops into Athens.

One thing that amused the parachutists was that they had been given a Greek glossary marked "not to be produced in

public," although I suppose it meant "not to be produced in Italy." Their morale was magnificent and many of the injured had to be forced to have medical attention, insisting that others had more urgent need of it. The bandage shortage was appalling and, the sheets failing to supply the deficiency, paper had to be used.

Next day, in calmer weather, the rest of the airborne reinforcements arrived. It was a glorious sight. At one time more than a thousand parachutes of different colours were in the air, billowing in the bright sunshine, as men and supplies dropped together. The villagers pounced eagerly on the parachutes. I was later presented with a pair of brilliant green pyjamas made from one, but, unfortunately, owing to some error, they had been made for a man about the size of Carnera.

What most impressed me about the Megara landings was the easy way in which the gliders touched down, seemingly as light as feathers and at such a slow speed that it seemed impossible for them to come to harm. Then their noses would open and out would roll some monstrously heavy object like a jeep or a miniature bulldozer. This had important consequences for me. When I volunteered for the Rhine crossing with the Sixth Airborne Division I was encouraged by my recollection of these safe and smooth landings at Megara. It seemed so much safer than rushing towards the earth at eighty or a hundred miles an hour in a powered aircraft. I felt that gliding was also much preferable to the violent impact of parachuting.

A Dakota came over from Rome, carrying a number of correspondents. When it landed, among those who stepped out was my enterprising colleague of *The Daily Telegraph*, John Wallis. I was delighted, not only to meet him and hear the news from civilisation, but also because he could take some copy back. I sometimes wonder when I found time to write anything. The fact is that, somehow, I *did*, and during "Towanbucket" sent over fifteen thousand words to London. It was always well to have something ready just in case a messenger from Mars arrived. S-K stimulated me with his own inexhaustible energy and prodigious output.

And so to Athens, to tumultuous scenes of mass enthusiasm and delight which made our reception so far seem merely polite formality. S.B.S. patrols felt forward while the main body of the Bucketeers was held up for four days in Megara. The patrols contacted General Spiliotopoulos, who had been appointed as military governor of Athens by Middle East Command as far back as August 4. With great audacity he had been carrying out his duties from underground headquarters ever since, and had even plastered on the walls his notices and announcements. How he found the space was a mystery, for Athens seemed to be inhabited exclusively by amateur sign-writers, who made all available walls hideous with their slogans and exhortations. Sometimes the writers had grown tired at a crucial moment, and left the message unfinished. Thus outside the British embassy ragged lettering, twelve inches high, appealed: "Three cheers for Churchill. Three cheers for Stalin. General Sir Maitl . . ."

General Felny, the German commander in Athens, saw the writing on the walls. Before leaving on October 12 he tactfully laid a wreath on the Greek Unknown Warrior's grave.

Lord Jellicoe and Major Patterson also went on ahead into Athens, circumventing the German road-blocks by embarking in a caique. They rode the last few miles on captured German bicycles. Meanwhile the British commando force from the islands had landed at the Piraeus and green berets joined red amid universal rapture.

We British journalists eventually arrived at dusk on October 14 after patrols had chased away the German rearguards and disproved reports of impassable demolitions and numerous mines on the Athens road. We set out in a jeep column of airborne troops to cover the last twenty-five miles. One could never be certain that the road was clear, and I, for one, felt a good deal of uneasiness until we reached the village of Megalo Pevko. There we encountered an ancient car with newly and crudely painted flags on it—a Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. The Greek driver popped out like a jack-in-the-box and danced a jig of joy. He had motored through from the capital over

roads quickly repaired by swarms of willing labourers. Blown sections had been filled in with earth and only once was it necessary to follow a long diversion over the fields.

In the outskirts of Athens we passed under an endless series of triumphal arches, most of which bore the legend in English: "Welcome to our allies." Soon we were ploughing through a roaring crowd that used million-drachma notes as confetti and also showered us with laurel wreaths, flowers, and rice. Andartes lining the roads fired continuous salutes with their pistols. Small boys lit pieces of cordite. Coloured Very lights soared in the air. If my jeep slowed down, admirers nearly dragged me out of it and pumphandled my arm till it ached. The crowds incessantly chanted the one English word they had been taught by self-appointed cheer leaders: "Wel-come, Wel-come." Men with bristling chins kissed me violently and repeatedly on both cheeks. The women were less forward.

When at last we arrived in Panepestimon Street at the Grande Bretagne Hotel, which was blazing with lights, the demonstration reached its boisterous peak. As the jeep stopped I was seized by an ecstatic mob and thrown up into the air. It was the first time I have ever been tossed in a blanket without any blanket, sheer exuberance as the motive. I pleaded for mercy and a man bellowed in my ear, "Ah, sir. You must excuse them. They are very happy. They have been waiting for four years for this."

Owing to the generous hospitality of the Greek peasants, who killed every remaining unfatted calf and half-starved chicken to entertain us, we had little idea of the miserable conditions on which most people were existing until we reached the Grande Bretagne. It was a complete contrast to the humble cottages where we had often slept on bare boards but had been fed like fighting cocks. All the hotel's scrupulous peace-time elegance was maintained, and we were each given a bedroom with a bath attached, but there was practically no food and no hot water. Incidentally, as in Rome, this lack of food did not seem to affect the vitality of the population, who also looked fairly well

dressed. We, of course, freely and unofficially distributed what tinned rations we could spare.

There was also a flourishing black market and wonderful meals could be obtained for milliards of drachmas—they had now ceased to talk about millions. I strongly suspect that some of the white flour sent by the Red Cross was finding its way into these restaurants. If the Andartes, instead of shooting rival politicians, had executed some of the black marketeers they might have had more common sense and justice on their side. Archbishop Damaschinos told me that ninety per cent of Athens' children were either consumptive or on the verge, through malnutrition.

High above this seething, joyful Athens, dominating it with serene nobility, was the flood-lit Acropolis. We wondered that the electric light was still available everywhere and could be used so prodigally. The story was that the German demolition party ordered to blow up the chief power station had been routed by Andartes.

Once again the Germans had belied the name of Hun by zealously protecting all the classical monuments. When, in my part of incorrigible sightseer, I went up to the Acropolis next day on the back of a motor-cycle, I found that only one vandal had attempted to leave his mark. Even he had merely hacked his name on a wooden bench and spared the doric columns. In contrast I recently saw the walls of the Tudor kitchen at Hampton Court disfigured with hundreds of signatures. The worst infamy was "Joyce and Mary" scrawled in lipstick.

The Parthenon, undefiled, unequalled, stood for man's creative and artistic genius. Elsewhere in the city was a sordid building that stood for man the beast—the Gestapo headquarters. But it also stood for man the martyr and saint. The cells still bore signs of whipmarks and blood-stains. One dark, windowless cell, only three feet across, had the words pencilled on the wall in Greek: "We must have courage. Here I found the God I had lost."

In one white-washed cell I deciphered an English name which looked like "William Turtin, 474675." It was enclosed in a pencilled square with a little cross above and

below the words: "His memory will live for ever." In another cell prisoners had written last messages before being executed. One man had named the man who denounced him—a certain death warrant. Before leaving, the Germans were said to have hurled the Greek gaoler to his death in a well of the building where one could see rats crawling in the odious mess.

Jellicoe, who was promoted to full colonel, was now given command of a mixed force of about a thousand to march to Salonika. He said that correspondents could accompany him provided they were willing to lend a hand when required. Although memories of the Megara ammunition collecting filled me with some misgivings, I offered to go. Later, I changed my mind. The offer of a lift to Rome in an American aircraft presented itself. I needed some clothing, and, besides, I now had information that Capell was arriving in a day or two. If the office wanted it, I thought, I could easily return. We correspondents had the habit of hopping from country to country as from station to station on the Underground. It gave one the impression that after the war Greece would be as near London as, say, Scotland, and I gave many promises of returning, forgetting that there would be barriers of money and restricted holidays.

Before I left there were already signs that the peace and rejoicing would not last long. There had been many hints of the fierce fratricidal hates simmering in the general ferment, though it was exceedingly difficult for an Englishman to grasp the reasons. In some of the villages through which we passed men had pushed through the crowds to whisper into my ear conspiratorial warnings about the Elas organisation. I wrote, on October 12: "In the chaotic political and administrative situation existing today in Athens the possibility of a *coup d'état* by Elas cannot be ruled out. Elas has Communist tendencies, but is by no means 100 per cent Communist."

One night in Athens, John Nixon of the B.B.C. and I were dining with a Greek family and a young woman expressed to us what our arrival had meant. "Last night," she said, "was the first for many months when my sleep

was not disturbed by police taking bodies into the mortuary next door."

I listened half-incredulously. Next afternoon I happened to be in a café opposite the Grande Bretagne Hotel. It was the day when Athens was one huge, demented, flag-waving procession in honour of the return of the Prime Minister—one procession, one cause for joy, but many parties, many leaders. Prime Minister Papandreou had been addressing a vast concourse of people in Constitution Square. Then, with Lieutenant-General Scobie and Vice-Admiral Mansfield, he motored across to the Unknown Warrior's shrine opposite. Lovely Greek girls dressed in national costumes had formed a great V as two wreaths were placed on the memorial, one decked with the Greek flag and the other with red, white and blue. All was peaceful, colourful, sentimental. The Union Jack, the Greek flag, and the Hammer and Sickle were almost evenly represented.

Seated in this café, I was reflecting upon the enthusiastic meeting and the promise it held of a united, new-born Greece. I thought, too, of the scene at the Acropolis where four tall, dark beauties dressed in the gay festal costumes of Macedonia, Attica, Epirus and Athens formed a tableau, holding a large Greek flag between them.

Suddenly there was a flurry in the doorway. Two men bolted in, two very frightened men, running like rats from a terrier. They rushed to the bar and crouched behind it, the humane barman consenting to hide them. Twenty or more men and women stampeded through the narrow doorway in crowd panic. Then in rushed the killers, with drawn pistols. I believe they were Communists, who had taken exception to some remarks shouted at them from the pavement as they marched past with their fists thrashing the air. This trivial insult, which would have raised a laugh in London, was to be avenged in blood. As an Englishman I was quite incapable of understanding the deadly seriousness of Greek politics. I was acutely aware, however, that to intervene would be decidedly worse than coming between a squabbling husband and wife. Nevertheless, a vision of that sagging corpse at Nimes came into my mind and I

lf rose with a vague idea of doing something, I don't now what. The killers glared round the bar. Then they w me—as far as they were concerned a British officer. They paused irresolutely, then of one accord thrust the stols into their holsters and came over to shake hands. Afterwards they walked away quietly. I resumed my litary drink, and I never saw the fugitives again. They ust have been spirited away by a back exit.

Such was the murderous and explosive atmosphere of thens, and the effect of a British uniform. Unfortunately ere were not enough uniforms. By the way, it was not ly the Communists who were prepared to shoot on small rovocation.

. . . . .

Back in Rome once more, I had the joyful news that the ffice agreed to my coming home for Christmas. I wandered ound the shops with Godfrey Talbot, who was also home- ard bound, looking for presents. One heavenly discovery as of German-made plastic toy soldiers. These miniature rmies in the Rome shops were surely the best available in e world and I bought some with pleasure. There had been ime in the pacifist 'thirties, when my wife and I banned oy soldiers because we thought it encouraged military eas. No qualms troubled me now as I stuffed my few urchases into my suitcase. It was grand to come back ke Father Christmas.

Before leaving, I attended a conference at the Grande otel given by General Alexander. "Alex," as everybody alled him, had that quality which is common to all great ar leaders—the power of inspiring loyalty and devotion n those around him. His senior officers discussed his little eculiarities with affection, and, when the relative merits f commanders were debated, heatedly maintained that Alex" was a better general than "Monty." One slight ecentricity was that he issued his personal badge to many f his closest associates. This was an enamelled head- uarters emblem, depicting the Mediterranean, represented y wavy blue lines, on a sienna-red background. It was orn on the left breast pocket, beneath *pukka* decorations. He also indulged a fancy for original uniforms. On this



occasion he wore one of dark, greenish khaki, with a light leather Italian belt, instead of a Sam Browne. He had black top-boots and black buttons to match. His uniform seemed to be getting as cosmopolitan as his army.

Many thought his manner was supercilious and reserved, compared with the bluff heartiness of, say, General Leese. But this, his crisp way of talking and his impassive features were a mask for an Irishman's sense of humour. One of the Americans asked him if he would make his guess when the war was going to end. "I don't guess, I calculate," he said.

Then he made the remarkably accurate prediction that the war would be over in 1945. He talked about his "double-handed punch" exemplified by the Salerno and Anzio operations. The General was not without a just appreciation of his own merits as a commander. He told us that when history came to be written, he had a "nice, sneaking feeling" that the Italian campaign would be adjudged one of the most brilliant and successful in the war. I would like to be able to fulfil that forecast, but perhaps this book does not qualify as pure history.

A few days later the General was good enough to invite me to his farewell party, held in the famous villa once associated with Lady Emma Hamilton, overlooking Naples Bay. I met and interviewed him first when he was sitting on a soap-box in the dusty compound of a Burmese house-on-stilts at the end of the Burma army's retreat in 1942. Then, in 1945, I saw him at the proud moment of his receiving the Freedom of the City of London. But I like to think of him best in that time of triumphant farewell in Italy when, surrounded by his own comrades in arms, he stood in a blaze of coloured lights on the verandah, chatting genially and basking in success. On each of these several occasions "Alex" was the same calm and dominant personality. Victory, defeat, or public honour made no difference to him, as far as I could detect.

Alexander was proudest of his record as a front-line soldier in World War I, but I thought the finest tribute to him was contained in the straightforward language of Gort's despatch on Dunkirk.

“By midnight on 2/3 June all the remaining British troops had embarked. Major-General Alexander, with the senior naval officer (Captain W. G. Tennant, R.N.), made a tour of the beaches and the harbour in a motor-boat, and on being satisfied that no British troops were left on shore they themselves left for England.”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### AIRBORNE BALLAST

ANOTHER happy family reunion followed. We felt that peace was in the air. When the invasion shadows were lifted from the Sussex coast the family had moved back to a tiny bungalow at Angmering-on-Sea, originally acquired in Munich days as a combined air-raid and holiday investment. The newly painted bungalow smelt of peace. It was also Christmas-time. I thought hard and seriously about a post-war job.

The office, too, seemed to be thinking of peace and rehabilitation. Television attracted me once again. I knew it would eventually be something far bigger, better and more important than radio, stage or screen. But it was a distant prospect. Obviously it would be some years before even the 1939 standard of public service would be restored. Meanwhile, though the war obstinately refused to end, I found myself suddenly "without a front."

John Wallis had taken over the Eighth Army; Capell was covering the trouble in Greece. On the Western Front we had a strong team, including Christopher Buckley, H. D. Ziman, and Peter Lawless.<sup>1</sup> Although I felt that family claims, waived in the urgent stresses of 1940-4, now had some priority, I was perturbed about the professional status of a frontless war correspondent, and wondered, inwardly, whether this was another tumble off the steps.

I found myself at the reporter's desk once more. There is a story, gleefully repeated in *The Daily Telegraph* office, that the famous correspondent Bennet Burleigh, returning after many campaigns, was sent to cover an inquest at Lambeth. This may be apocryphal. It did not happen to

<sup>1</sup> To the great sorrow of his colleagues, Lawless was killed at Remagen.

me. Instead, I was sent to the "Cleft Chin" murder trial at the Old Bailey.

The change from sunshine to drizzling grey skies, from a roving commission to office routine, from a front-page splash to a down-column paragraph was a more serious trial to me than the "Cleft Chin" case. All the time, the thought nagged: "You didn't see it through. You went so far, then you packed up."

I made a desperate resolve. One night I walked into Skelton's room. He was very busy and looked up, rather testily. "Yes, Gander?"

"I must be in at the kill," I said. "Even if it means making a parachute drop."

Skelton relaxed and stared. "All right," he said. "I'll think about it."

The idea grew. I envisaged a drop in some spectacular manner ahead of our advanced troops, so that I could be the first correspondent into Berlin. Even at its earliest conception the whole idea frightened me terribly; frightened, yet fascinated me. Then, after I had screwed up my courage to this dramatic gesture, there was an appalling anticlimax. Nothing happened. Nothing whatever, for weeks and weeks. I went about my petty reporting business, trying to learn the job all over again.

Then, in the heavy and electrical atmosphere of early March, 1945, when a war weary people braced themselves for a second D-day—the Rhine crossing—the telephone jarred a Sunday evening like a dentist's drill. I was staying with my mother-in-law, Mabel Rowley, at Slinfold. All day the Sussex air had quivered to the roar of British and American air fleets. A voice from the distant news room said that Alastair Shannon, the foreign news editor, wanted to see me early next morning.

"What's the job?" I asked, with carefully simulated casualness.

"It's an airborne thing, I believe," said the speaker, forgetting security rules for once.

Fear mauled my heart. I thought: "Well, I can say

My wife, disconcerting thought-reader, needed no telling. The nobility and patient resignation of women shines like a beacon through the agonies of war. Theirs the difficult, the waiting part. Neither of us slept that night. She, neither by word nor deed, attempted to dissuade me. As for me, I thought over and over again: "What a damn fool I am. Why must I go on taking these risks? One day I shall go too far." Then other ideas cancelled these. I had the free choice. Millions of fine men were flung into action without it. It was my duty.

Ambition spoke, too. This was a chance, if a desperate one, of putting myself at the head of the pack in the final phase. Though apparently "on the shelf," I might yet be the first in Berlin. But I should have to have an extraordinarily large slice of luck.

By dawn, after weary mental struggles, I had made up my mind positively and took the train to town to find out what Shannon had to say. Other reporters in the news room, who had an idea that there was something in the wind, stared at me curiously. Shannon, as equable and unruffled as ever, took me into a private room to tell me what he knew. He did not know where and when the projected operation would take place. There was to be a draw conducted by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association for places and it was understood that there was to be both an American and a British division participating.

Shannon was not very confident of my chances of being drawn out of the hat. He said that if I were not picked to go in with the British division and stay till they were relieved, then I might go in one of the Halifax tugs. I astonished him by saying that I was convinced I *would* be chosen, adding that for various reasons I had decided not to parachute but to go in by glider. This partial change of mind was due to many considerations. In the first place, at my age there was a remarkably good chance of sustaining some crippling injury in the actual drop. Then, in this particular operation, it seemed that gliding would suit the purpose equally well of putting me ahead of the Second Army correspondents. Then, as I have already mentioned, the Megara landings had impressed me with the efficiency of

gliders. Most important of all, I wanted my typewriter with me, and, finally, I thought I should feel braver in company.

Shannon, who had already sent in my name to the N.P.A., was no doubt still thinking sceptically of my "hunch" when his telephone rang, and as he picked off the receiver and listened I saw his look of incredulity. "Your name *was* first out of the hat," he said. "There are two others going with the British division, agency men, and all stories are to be pooled."

I was naturally expected to keep my mouth shut about the coming expedition. The Shaef section at the Ministry of Information especially emphasised the security angle, as any leakage, it was felt, would have calamitous consequences. I hardly know how to describe the dreadful strain of the days that followed. Despite all the official exhortations to silence, there was far too much "pub whispering" about the coming operation going on in Fleet Street. Men on other newspapers, as well as my own, would come up to me with knowing looks, full of mysterious hints.

My colleague H. D. Ziman warned me that, at a luncheon party, somebody had said to him, "Do you want to know where the boys in red berets are going?" Then the tipster indicated Denmark on the map. All this increased the nervous tension considerably. I still made a pretence of going in and working in the news room as if nothing had happened. The suspense was shocking.

My intense and nagging curiosity as to where we were to be dropped remained unsatisfied as the days passed. I felt unable to concentrate on anything and, despite my unshakable resolve, began to go through what I imagine are all the sensations of a man in the condemned cell. I called on Major-General Lord Burnham, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, to ask if *he* could give me any clue. Lord Burnham, whose charm and affability were a byword among the correspondents, was on this occasion reticent but encouraging. He said that about seventeen airborne operations were organised for every one that actually came off, and that this one was quite likely to be cancelled like the rest. He also pointed out that

although Arnheim had been a grim and expensive business from the military standpoint, nevertheless no member of the Press party, either among correspondents or conducting officers, was killed, though one correspondent was taken prisoner.

Lord Burnham made no attempt to minimise the dangers of an airborne show, but somehow I found this chat with the organiser of the perimeter at Dunkirk a great morale-raiser. Next day I met our military critic, Lieutenant-General Martin, and it was from him that I had the first confirmation of the belief in the back of my mind that we were to make the Rhine crossing. But even he did not know for certain.

Meanwhile the news that the Americans had established the Remagen bridgehead and were rapidly extending it made me wonder whether, after all, the airborne effort would be considered necessary. However, all conjecture was set at rest when on the afternoon of March 19 my office telephone rang and Shaef told me to report to their office at the Ministry of Information by 9.45 on the following morning. I went off to my home at Angmering-on-Sea in a gloomy, overwrought mood, wondering whether any of the office workers and family men in my compartment, who made this same dreary journey in an overcrowded compartment day after day, realised that one among them might be their travelling companion for the last time.

That night I made my simple preparations for departure, helped by my wife, who concealed her feelings with great courage, for such a sensitive soul. All I took was a water-bottle, a shoulder pack containing a clean shirt and some handkerchiefs, one blanket and my fleece-lined trench coat. Then next morning, after the painful ordeal of farewell, I went trudging down the street in the half-light, to catch the 7.46 train to Victoria. My uniform drew some inquisitive glances, especially from a journalistic colleague whom I met on the platform. But no questions were asked and I kept my counsel, reflecting once again upon the impossibility of concealing that there was "something doing."

At Victoria I secured a taxi without much difficulty and drove straight to the Ministry of Information, only stopping on the way to buy a pair of exceptionally strong leather braces and several pairs of bootlaces. Braces, I find, have an extraordinary habit of breaking at critical moments, and one usually loses most of the trouser buttons, anyway. Against this latter contingency there is no protection but a belt, which I had. Bootlaces share the same weakness as braces. Apart from that, however, they are useful for a variety of purposes. On one occasion I tied up a Pole's false leg, which had collapsed under him, with bootlaces. Each of Wingate's Chindits had wound round his slouch hat several yards of leather bootlace to use in emergency as tourniquets.

When I arrived in the Shaef room at the Ministry I found I had been overzealous and was the first there. There soon arrived diminutive Seaghan Maynes, of Reuters, lanky Allan Wood, an Australian of the Exchange Telegraph Company, and the boyish, freckled Bob Vermilion, of the United Press of America. Vermilion I had met before in Italy, where he had done what the Americans call a "swell job" at the Anzio beach-head, then again in Greece. He looked about fifteen but was probably nearer thirty and had parachuted into the south of France when the American Seventh Army made their landings on the Riviera. Vermilion, quiet, fearless and humorous, was extremely popular with his British colleagues. Maynes and Wood, both of whom had been at Arnhem, were presently joined by a third veteran of Arnhem, Stanley Maxted, a Canadian working for the B.B.C. Maxted was the oldest member of the party. Personally had I been in his shoes and nearing fifty I should have been more than satisfied with one airborne job.

Dark and lively little Maynes, who bounced round the room in his excitement, was a great contrast to the silent and serious Maxted. Finally, rather to my surprise, another correspondent arrived, a slight and eager youth from the *Daily Express* named Bocca. I had originally thought that I was to be the only daily newspaper correspondent and perhaps the only correspondent, as on the Leros show. It was now



apparent that, with some of the frequent changes of plan apt to occur in P.R. affairs, there were to be six. Wood, Vermilion and Maynes all elected to parachute while the rest of us chose gliders. Vermilion said he thought gliders were dangerous and he liked to be entirely independent. Later I heard many parachutists, who had been assigned to gliders, expressing similar sentiments. Personally I preferred company. It is a nice psychological point. Also, I insistently harked back to the thought that it would be a great mistake to be parted from my typewriter.

Bocca, desperately anxious to make good on his first big story, made no secret of his own inexperience. He was a boy in the early twenties, who had been in the Merchant Navy, and had already, so I believe, been wounded in action while manning anti-aircraft guns at sea.

A genial officer in a red beret arrived—a Captain Cattle—who introduced himself as one of our conductors. He apologised to the Arnhem veterans for not having allowed them to wear their red berets on their way to the Ministry for fear of giving the show away. With such frightful feelings boiling inside me, requiring all my self-control to master, I marvelled that men who had been through the Arnhem ordeal could cheerfully volunteer again for a second one. On occasions like this, I realise that true greatness of spirit lies chiefly in ability to conquer fear, and what John Pudney calls “the quaking heart.” I have just seen that great Noel Coward film *This Happy Breed* and came away with a phrase stuck in my mind, a phrase which seemed, in the inimitable Coward way, to epitomise the truth about Munich and the latent strength of British character. The Cockney father of a family, veteran of 1914-18, returning home after seeing the crowds cheering Chamberlain for bringing “peace in our time,” remarks sourly to somebody, “I never thought to see the British people act like that because they had been badly frightened.”

We plied the smiling Cattle with many questions, but he was not yet prepared to answer, and took us round to the back entrance of the Ministry to cram into two jeeps. We then began to speed through London's traffic, heading past Marble Arch and through Bayswater, keeping up a

inning fire of slightly strained banter. Shortly before leaving the Ministry, Cattle had permitted me, rather with the air of a man granting one dying wish, to telephone my news editor, Maclaren, and request him to let me have some money. I must not tell Mac where I was, but the money could be left for me in an envelope at the lodge, to be picked up by a soldier who would bring it back to the Ministry by car. Mac, when I spoke to him, was calm as ever and unsurprised at this mysterious procedure. The money was deposited in an envelope at *The Daily Telegraph* lodge, duly collected, and delivered to me. Cattle intended that the operation would not take place immediately and we would be held *incommunicado* somewhere for some time.

This aura of secrecy was maintained inconsistently and with only moderate success. Airborne jeeps took us conspicuously to the large country house—a peace-time golf club—which was the headquarters of the Airborne Corps at Moor Park, Rickmansworth. When we arrived there, after a couple of hours driving through the north-western suburbs of London, we were met by Major Roy Oliver, of Public Relations, who was to be in charge of the Press party. Major Oliver had a high reputation among my colleagues, for it was he who guided the war correspondents away from Arnheim and practically passed through the German lines to do so. Oliver wore thickish, horn-rimmed spectacles giving him a grave and intent air, not altogether in keeping with his daring character. He was considerate and efficient and his affectionate pride in the Airborne Corps was demonstrated in everything he did and said.

Oliver told us that we had now said goodbye to the outside world until such time as the operation was complete. He said that we would have lunch, spend the afternoon collecting equipment, and then be taken to a camp where we would remain till D-day. He told us that we were to be attached to the British Sixth Airborne Division under command of Major-General Eric Bols, who would himself give us a detailed briefing. In the meantime he could reveal the main secret, namely, that they were to establish a Rhine crossing. A former plan to use the Sixth Airborne Division

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to make a landing somewhere in Schleswig-Holstein. Denmark had been abandoned.

We each had a preliminary beer in the officers' mess, considering the circumstances and the pent-up excitement. I was surprised at the general abstemiousness. Then, after a lunch of fat pork, we went with Oliver to a group of stores to draw various items of equipment from the storehouse master. These comprised a heavy dome-shaped helmet, a loose camouflage jacket that clipped between the legs and had a zip fastener in front, a strange-looking hat like a piece of fishing net, a precious red beret, and a vest of triangular yellow silk.

Oliver explained that the object of the cord vest, which looked rather like chain mail, was to keep the wearer warm by friction. It was light, and kept clean longer than the other vests. The yellow triangle was to be stuffed into the battle-dress blouse to be whipped out and held to the chest for purposes of identification. I could see that one would have to act pretty swiftly with the silk, and, myself, I doubted its practicability. However, as our greenish-brown camouflage jacket was said to resemble the one of a parachutist's smock I could see the point.

We were also given a piece of camouflage netting to slip over the steel helmet, and the fiddling job of putting it on occupied our nervous fingers for some time. While we waited for the next move in this gloomy game, we wandered restlessly about the grounds of the clubhouse building. I put on my red beret with self-conscious pride and it immediately became my most prized possession. Then I took it off, and placed it on a table while I went to wash my hands. On returning in three minutes I found that the body guard had taken it and replaced it with one two sizes too small. So, mortified, I trudged back to the quarters, where, after much trouble, I found another one of size of  $7\frac{1}{2}$ .

Oliver now began to marshal his forces into three columns which were to take us to our temporary "internment" camp. We had been joined by several photographers, who were to accompany the expedition, and we began to seem like a needlessly prolonged circular tour

northern suburbs. I had little Maynes and Bocca as companions. Maynes chattered incessantly in his Irish brogue about Arnhem, about parachuting, and dozens of other topics. Bocca revealed his ambitions and his anxiety to do well on this, his first big professional chance. He was so new to the job that he had not even brought a typewriter with him, unaware that even under the most hazardous and difficult conditions the field censor demands carbon copies of everything a war correspondent writes. Hours passed and we found ourselves eventually rolling through the Essex countryside in the neighbourhood of Braintree. As dusk was falling we reached the camp, known as Mushroom Farm, a small town of Nissen huts surrounded by barbed-wire enclosures.

To write down the name of that camp revives in me the sense of shivering foreboding that I felt as we passed through the gate. Oliver said that only the "glider types" were to stay at Mushroom Farm, the parachutists were to go somewhere else, but, before we split up, the whole party would, on the following morning, have a briefing from Major-General Bols. So we were introduced to our sleeping quarters—camp beds, well supplied with blankets, in a long, gloomy Nissen hut with a bare floor.

Officers and other ranks were now pouring into the camp. We found the mess, another Nissen, very overcrowded, but the bar was well stocked with whisky, gin and beer and comfortably withstood this invasion. We had dinner, one of those copious, mass cooked army meals, served on bare trestle tables. Then we gathered in the adjoining hut to consider what we should do for the night. That was the terrible, perpetual problem. We were all over-excited, overstrained and pretending to be nonchalant. It was practically impossible to concentrate on anything. We endlessly thrashed over the question of where we were going to land, what was the best technique on touching down, etc., etc. We tried to think what we should need most urgently. The others had succeeded in getting an entrenching tool each. I had not, and felt distinctly worried about this. But experienced Maxted questioned whether we would have much time at first to dig in and said that he personally

intended to bolt for the nearest ditch until such time as it seemed reasonably safe to move about.

As war correspondents, we were forbidden under the Geneva Convention to carry any arms. If they caught us with arms the Germans were entitled to shoot us. This consideration did not worry the volatile Maynes in the least, for he had come armed to the teeth and said he had every intention of using his weapons. He had, as far as I remember, two pistols and averred that he was going to acquire a Sten gun as well. Vermilion also said that he intended to carry arms but Wood dropped unarmed.

There was a great temptation to drink too much, which I must say, was fairly well resisted, especially by young Bocca, who was determined to allow nothing to impair his efficiency.

As usual, I myself had determined not to carry arms. Fundamentally, I suppose, it was abhorrence of killing that influenced me, but I fully realised that in war many stout fellows to whom bloodshed was equally repugnant had to conquer their feelings, just as I would if some brute came to commit an outrage against home and family. But apart from these considerations, I have always insisted that a war correspondent must keep his faculties concentrated exclusively on the job. To rush into battle shooting left, right, and centre, as an enthusiastic amateur, is likely to be a positive menace to your own side. Then, of course, there was the question of the curious rules by which we play this lunatic game. I found many of my colleagues inclined to discount the rules and to regard themselves as combatants. Yet, as I discovered by attendance afterwards at war crime trials, the rules are serious indeed—if absurdly inconsistent.

The days dragged interminably. Our prison confinement extended to a large field where there were ammunition dumps. Young Bocca and I tramped grimly and nervously round and round it for exercise, he questioning me closely all the time about the tricks of the mad trade into which he had flung himself with such passionate zeal. I wandered about the camp, trying to acquire some of the items I thought

I should need, such as a belt and an entrenching tool. This last thing began to prey on my mind, but, fortunately for my mental peace, the quartermaster at length produced one. At nights we played, as our chief amusement, reckless and erratic games of poker.

On the third day of our internment Major Roy Oliver, brisk and confident, turned up at the camp. He told us that General Bols wished to give us a briefing immediately. It was a relief to our taut nerves to know that shortly we would be told the best or worst. We trooped down the long concrete roads of this ugly, rectangular town, trying to discover the system by which the huts were numbered. At last we found the right hut, and were admitted to a bare Nissen exactly like all the rest. The General was there, alone, standing rather like a schoolmaster, with a pointer, in front of a large map spread on blackboards. He was tall, slim, fair, young-looking for his forty-odd years—a smiling, debonair Anglo-Saxon, wearing a coloured choker, fixed with a pin, instead of collar and tie. We were introduced one by one, and the General shook each cordially by the hand. Then we sat on forms, listening with rapt attention, while he unfolded a story of life or death.

British Second Army, we were told, were to attack across the river between the towns of Emmerich and Wessel. Eighteenth U.S. Airborne Corps, consisting of two divisions, namely the Sixth British and the Seventeenth U.S. Airborne Division, were to be a “bonus” to this attack.

“I mean by that,” said the General, in his level, matter-of-fact tones, “that the main attack across the river by Twelve Corps on the right and Thirty Corps on the left will take place in any event. Our participation is entirely dependent on the weather. If the weather holds, we shall be a bonus—a large and satisfactory bonus if you like, but nevertheless something which need not decisively affect the action. Ninth American Army will cross on the right of the British Second. We may have one hell of a scrap for forty-eight hours or a week. Then again, if the weather holds and traffic control works, we may have one of the finest skelters across Europe you can imagine. If the weather is unfavourable, the operation will be cancelled.”

The General spoke with relish of his "hell of a scrap" though it fairly chilled my blood. However, I could take some comfort when he came more precisely to the details. Though we were to be dropped in daylight, which had many disadvantages, it seemed that the battle would be well underway and, I hoped, the enemy would be suitably demoralized before it came to our turn. On the night before D-day the Commando Brigade was to storm Wessel, after crossing the river in boats. Some hours later, presumably just before dawn, Thirty Corps were to cross on a wide front, driving in the general direction of Bocholt. The number of reserves, said the General cheerfully, was colossal—three times the number required as a minimum. I admit to vagueness about the last multiple, but it sounded extremely satisfying at the time.

General Bols now began to talk about airborne operations and ours in particular.

"There are three kinds of airborne operations," he said. "There's the Wingate type, in which forces are dropped inside enemy country for harassing purposes, and maintained exclusively by supplies dropped from the air. Then there is the Arnhem type, where you drop forces according to an elaborate plan with a view to seizing river crossings; but, in doing so, hold out a carrot to the enemy showing him what your general line of advance is going to be. Then there is the third type, which we are going to embark on: an airborne operation in close support of the main battle. This, in my view, is the best and most useful way of employing airborne forces. We may hope, if all goes well, to loosen up the scrum and set the armies behind us swinging."

As we listened, enthralled, to this lecture, I reflected that the reason for inattentiveness on the part of the average schoolboy is that he has not got enough at stake. Schoolmasters take note; though I'm not recommending a parachute course as an alternative to six of the best on the backside.

When the General came down to closer detail, he began to jab at the map with his pointer. Third Parachute Bri-

(Glider) Brigade were going to drop in "this area." Fifth Para Brigade somewhere else. This technique made him difficult to follow, but after a while we were invited to ask questions and thus elucidated that the division were to swoop in the vicinity of the village of Hamminkeln, in an area roughly between four and six thousand yards over the Rhine. The first parachutists dropped were to have the job of clearing the Diersfordterwald and securing some high ground. Then, gliders of the Sixth Air Landing Brigade were to be crash-landed on bridges over the little river Issel, in order to secure the crossings by a *coup de main*.

"One great difference between this and Arnhem," said the General cheerfully, "is that we shall be covered by a heavy concentration of artillery, including a formidable assembly of medium guns. This in addition to the close support that will be given by the R.A.F."

As we took our leave of the smiling General our dominant thought was, "Well, it might not come off, after all." We did not know whether to feel relieved or sorry, but we stared up at the serene, sunlit sky thinking that such weather could not possibly last in an English March. One of the questions that the General had declined to answer was the date of D-day. But we knew that it could not be long delayed.

The quartermaster, bless him, now began to issue us with various other articles, each of which seemed to anticipate dire calamity.

First we were each presented with a Mae West life-saving jacket, in case we fell in the sea. Then, as a touching afterthought, we were each given a little red light, to attach to the Mae West by a clip, to guard against the possibility that we might fall in at night. I thought this showed deplorable lack of faith in gliders, because frankly I had not envisaged any particular trouble about crossing the Channel. Then, we were given emergency rations and shell dressings, and a great slab of stuff to throw in the sea colouring it yellow lest we should fall in by daylight. The curious thing was that, in their inscrutable wisdom, the brass-hats did not think we glider types needed parachutes. I found this most depressing.



One thing that kept us busy was trying to fix up the automatic inflating device on the Mae West, a tiresome business involving forcing gas cylinders into sockets that were too small to admit them. As usual, there were good fellows with nimble fingers who came forward to wrestle with the ridiculous things and do the job for me.

After lunch that day, Bocca came to me and said earnestly that he wanted my advice. He said that he was so determined to make the most of this big chance that he intended to ask if he could go with the Sixth Air Landing Brigade. Did I think that would be the best story? I said that while it would undoubtedly be a good story it sounded like straightforward suicide to me. Bocca, however, was not to be deterred. He went off and asked Major Oliver, whom I am glad to say, severely discouraged it and finally dissuaded him on the ground that only armed fighting men should take part in a crash-landing mission of that kind.

That night before going to bed I began chatting with an R.A.M.C. doctor in the next bed in our hut. Many of our experienced companions were telling us grisly stories about the sick-making propensities of gliders, which, we were told, were liable to get caught in the tug's slipstream and lurch about in the most disconcerting way. The doctor said that he had an admirable cure for air-sickness, consisting of white pills. He gave me two, advising me not to take more because they were liable to cause intense thirst. Afterwards I discovered that these pills were not merely a cure for air-sickness, but also contained a proportion of hyoscine—a pacifying drug which does not, however, slow down the mental processes.

Next day our three parachutists—Wood, Vermilion and Maynes—left us for another camp. Captain Frank Garstang (an Army observer officer formerly on the *Newspaper Chronicle*) and I were detailed to go to Shepherd's Grove airfield to report to the captains of two Hamilcar gliders. This was one of the airfields from which the expedition was to start, and loading operations were going on. We rejoiced at being able to get out of the camp for a while and jumped almost light-heartedly into a jeep at the camp entrance.

Soon we were bowling along in a convoy decked from end to end with red berets, making all pretence at secrecy seem utterly absurd. Pedestrians stared at us apathetically. Here and there schoolchildren, snailing to school, paused on the pavement delighted at the hold-up by such a long procession, waving innocent hands. There was a biting cold wind, and we were all grateful when, after a long and chilly ride, we finally debouched on to the airfield.

Scores of gliders were drawn up on the field in serried rows. Many had their snouts raised and were beginning to swallow jeeps and small guns pushed up ramps into their rapacious jaws. I found that I had been assigned to a glider under command of a captain with a double-barrelled name who was attached to a mysterious organisation called "Phantom." Whenever I asked anybody what "Phantom" was, his face usually formed slowly into an expression of utmost horror and dismay, and he uttered a long-drawn whistle.

"Well, you've had it," he would say.

"But what *is* it?" I would insist.

"Well, I don't quite know," the Jonah would say, "but you've *had* it."

The most I could ever glean was that it was their job to acquire information about enemy dispositions and intentions and take it back to headquarters.

Captain Double-Barrelled was a charming, cultured man, upon whom the responsibility of having an unarmed correspondent as passenger weighed heavily. His problem was that the glider had to carry a jeep. This had to be lashed in the middle, which meant that passengers in the rear would have no connection or communication with those in the nose. As the jeep was itself heavily laden and had a trailer attached, also packed with gear, the glider could only take half a dozen persons. Captain D-B was the soul of courtesy, but was obviously not keen on taking me.

Frankly, I did not care much about this arrangement either. I thought I should prefer to be as near as possible to General Bols and the radio transmitter which P.R. were taking with them. Also there seemed a distinct possibility

that the jeep or trailer might fall on top of somebody on landing. Another point was that I preferred to have the company of sturdy Frank Garstang. We were doing the same jobs and would be able to stick together. Frank had not been able to find his assigned glider.

So, hoping that it did not seem ungrateful to Captain D-B, I decided to ask to be transferred to another glider which could accommodate both Frank and me. We cadged a lift back to Mushroom Farm in a jeep with a massive Canadian parachutist. Although we were all supposed to be so strictly incognito and *incommunicado*, we naughtily stopped at a public house in Braintree to have a pint or two. Naturally we did not discuss the coming operation, but there was no doubt that it was leaden on our minds. It was not a merry party, and the barmaid stared curiously at the three red berets, wondering, I suppose, if we had just been to a funeral.

When we arrived back at Mushroom Farm, rather late for lunch, we ran into Roy Oliver and told him about our ambition to change gliders. He said he would see what he could do, and then, looking at me in a penetrating, old-fashioned way, he added, "You look rather worried, Gander. Is there anything on your mind?"

I said, yes, plenty. I wanted to know exactly where we were supposed to land, and exactly where divisional headquarters would be in relation to our landing-field, so that, with the least possible delay, I could get there and begin to transmit my stories.

Oliver looked perplexed and said that his instructions were to have the Press correspondents distributed among as many different gliders as possible because it reduced the risk and also spread out the non-combatants among the fighting men. However, as Garstang was an observer officer and allowed to carry arms he could properly be put in the same glider with me, and therefore he (Oliver) would try to arrange it. Roy Oliver was a sincere and efficient person—a first-class chap. He came along that afternoon and said that as there seemed to be some points that required clarification he had asked the G-2 to come along.

The G-2, a harassed-looking major of impressive physique, arrived at our Nissen hut that afternoon at three o'clock and sat on a bed. We—that is reporters, conducting officers, photographers, censors and Major Roy Oliver—gathered round the bedside to catch his golden words.

He began by saying abruptly, "What is it that you want to know?" There was a gloomy but pregnant silence. Then Oliver turned to me and said, "You had some questions, I believe, Gander, hadn't you?" Becoming thus the unwilling spokesman, I repeated that I, personally, would like to know exactly where my particular glider was intended to land in relation to Divisional headquarters. I said "intended" bearing in mind a cheerful parting phrase of General Bols, who, as we took leave, had said, "If everything goes according to plan—and of course it won't, it never does—then we're in for a lovely party."

The Major heard my question with incredulity and looked more concerned than ever. "Haven't you studied air photographs?" he asked. I had to confess that we had not.

"Then you'd better do so immediately," said the Major. "You must familiarise yourselves with every inch of ground. You must realise that you are going to drop right in the middle of the Huns and you will be in action immediately. This is not going to be like Arnhem where we had plenty of time to get down and to think about organising our defences. The battle will begin from the instant you touch the ground—in fact before that, because we shall be fired at in the air."

We all exchanged unhappy glances. Somebody was sent scurrying off to get air photographs, and in the meantime the G-2 continued to lecture us on being prepared for the worst. It was abundantly clear that the G-2 was not keen on having unarmed civilians mixed up with the fighting men on this operation and, candidly speaking, I think he was perfectly right. At length my own particular air pictures were produced and I stared at the strange and meaningless light and shade, the various lines that represented roads, railway tracks and hedges. The captain who had brought in the pictures then pointed to a group of farm buildings

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which, he said, were to be stormed and used as divisional headquarters. He also indicated a point in a certain field where, he said, our glider was supposed to land. I did not find these aerial pictures, which need to be interpreted by expert eyes, very helpful, but I noticed some small white marks along the hedges of the field, where my glider was to land.

"What are those?" I inquired.

"Oh, those," said the captain casually. "They're German machine-gun posts." Then, as he caught the expression on my face, he added, "But it will be quite all right, the R.A.F. will look after that. There won't be much left of the Jerry machine-gun nests when the Typhoons have smeared them out. It's going to be the most terrific blitz ever."

We learnt that General Bols had been told by our intelligence that the Germans were moving their artillery up into the area of our drop. The R.A.F. asked if he wished them to do anything about it. General Bols replied, "Absolutely nothing. That's simply splendid. I'd far sooner drop on top of the guns and put them out immediately rather than have them some distance away opening fire on us while we're trying to consolidate."

Major Oliver now explained to me that, as I had asked, Garstang and I would be together, but not in the "Phantom" glider. We were to go with one of the divisional headquarters defence platoons. Another captain, whose name I forget, was introduced as the commanding officer of the platoon to which we were assigned. He was a charming, friendly man who had fought with the same division in Normandy, and I will call him Brown. He also made it politely clear—and I sympathise with him fully—that he disliked having a non-combatant in his glider. As a matter of fact, he had two, for the senior chaplain to the Sixth Airborne Division, the Rev. A. P. Cameron, was also assigned to his glider.

With every idle, passing hour the strain of waiting grew worse. Sometimes, as I paced restlessly up and down behind the barbed wire on evening strolls under a pallid March moon, the wild idea would come into my head of

myself into this.

One night we all went to the men's canteen, where beer was flowing fairly freely, and the parachutists were roaring out some of their choruses. Their favourite, which ran to the tune of "John Brown's Body", went:

*Glory, glory, what a helluva way to die,  
'Cause we ain't going to die no more.*

Then there was another to the melody of "Red River Valley," which went something like this:

*Come and stand by my side in the Whitley,  
Do not hasten to bid me adieu,  
But remember the poor parachutist  
And the job he is going to do.*

*When the red light goes on we are ready  
For the sergeant to shout Number One,  
Then we all huddle up close together  
And we all tumble out one by one.*

*If you keep both your feet close together  
And remember the sergeant's advice,  
Then whatever the wind and the weather  
You'll hit mother earth very nice.*

*So, come, stand by your glasses so ready,  
Here's a toast to the men of the sky;  
Let us drink to the men dead already  
And here's to the next one to die.*

Not brilliant poetry. In fact, positively feeble in places, but they sang it with gusto and feeling that fully compensated for deficiencies. All the same, I did not like the constant emphasis on imminent death. As the evening

wore on the singing became less coherent and there were Rabelaisian snatches such as:

*Jumping through the hole, jumping through the hole—  
I always keep my trousers clean when jumping through the  
hole.*

Then (to the tune of "The Yanks Are Coming"):

*For the Airborne's coming, and we'll keep things humming,  
And we won't go back till it's over over there.*

As the evening went on a more solemn note crept in. Somebody with a fair tenor voice was hoisted on to a table and began to sing "Seated one day at the organ." It was a new version, for at the end he suddenly turned it into "Jerusalem" and two or three hundred lusty voices joined in as moving a spontaneous performance as I have heard.

It is a commonplace that men reveal their religious natures when faced with mortal danger. This sincere and unpremeditated hymn singing was far more impressive than the stereotyped mumbo-jumbo of a formal service would have been. Here men were drawn together, on the eve of battle, into a warm and affectionate comradeship—a true Christian fraternity. The sad and paradoxical aspect was that they could only love one another because they had combined to hate and murder somebody else. Such is life—the greatest hate engendering the greatest love; the greatest violence the greatest heroism.

The singing died and the room began to empty. I found myself in conversation with a red-headed corporal parachutist whom I loved like a brother though he was unknown to me. His talk was a mixture of reminiscence, braggadocio and gloomy prophecy. He had jumped in Normandy and felt that his luck could not last. "I'm gunna get one right in the stomach, sir. I know it," was his theme. Then he would roar with laughter and gulp at his beer. I went to bed with his flesh-creeping descriptions of his own coming death agonies revolving in my mind.

That night there was an air raid, one of the ineffective tip-and-run affairs which the Germans interspersed with flying-bomb and rocket attacks. How strange if a casual

bomb should end it all now, I thought, lying awake and listening to the too familiar thuds and bangs. It seemed that the Jerries were making a night reconnaissance of the glider airfields—further proof, if any were needed, that they were perfectly well aware of what was going on.

Next morning in the washing hut, which for officers is the equivalent of the other ranks' latrine as a sounding-board for rumour, I heard that General Bols was going to address everybody in the camp at a formal parade at eleven o'clock. This looked like business and caused that sinking feeling. I wondered why nobody else seemed to be frightened and why the man called "Freddy," standing next to me stripped to waist, bothered to scrape away so meticulously round that exaggerated cavalry moustache of his, now slightly bedraggled and spattered with suds. Everybody went on borrowing bowls, jockeying for position at the hot-water pipe, elbowing their naked way to the trestle tables, just as if this were an ordinary sunny spring day. Their cultured, somewhat affected English voices discussed the inanities of the night before. Nobody said anything about battle, guns, war or sudden death—it was not done. The operation had the code name "Varsity," and, indeed, they might have been training for a rowing contest.

We all had a shock when the morning newspapers arrived. They were openly discussing the coming offensive and the prospects of an airborne attack. As a journalist, who has often argued with censors himself, I must make this reflection on human nature—that I lose enthusiasm for publishing a story if I feel that my own life is likely to be endangered by it. Still, there it was, in black and white, with diagrams suggested and drawn by various Smart Alecs showing where the attack was likely to be and where the airborne boys were likely to be dropped. We agreed that it was a poor show.

Later on that morning we assembled on the adjoining field used as an ammunition dump, the same ground which Bocca and I had often tramped on exercise, just as I imagine convicts do. The Press party were all together, and we did not look a disciplined military crowd. None of us was



all self-conscious about it anyway. Marshalled by Roy Oliver, we shambled into a serpentine line.

The troops in subdued mood, but impeccably turned out, formed a great hollow square. Our suppressed emotions found outlet in forced gaiety and a number of singularly unfunny wisecracks about our dress and unmilitary bearing. Presently General Bols arrived in a jeep, and some stentorian voice snapped the parade to attention. When his jeep came to a halt the General climbed on the bonnet, and shouted to everybody to break ranks, gather round, and sit on the grass. Then in a profound hush he began to explain the operational details which he had already given to the correspondents, except that this time he did not even hint that the operation might not come off. He concluded with some phrases that stick in my mind.

"They are narrow, winding roads. Don't get them choked up with traffic. That's the only thing I know of to stop us from swanning on as far as we can go. Two other things. If the civilians are well behaved and don't obstruct you—leave them alone. If they do obstruct you—shoot them. Secondly—no looting."

Up to the last remark the troops had listened in attentive silence. When he said "No looting" a titter rippled round the ranks. The distinction in war between requisitioning, legitimate seizure of enemy property for vital purposes, and looting is a fine one. Notoriously, most soldiers have a weakness for loot—particularly in the food line—and the red berets, because they were generally in the van, had more opportunities.

The General, affecting not to notice the titter, climbed slowly down from the jeep bonnet back into his seat and drove off. Scrambling to their feet, the men re-formed ranks and were dismissed. Since this had clearly been the final briefing, we knew it could not be long now. I went back to the hut and began to write a piece descriptive of the men and our internment. This I arranged to have sent after we had left the camp for the operation. It was an emotional story—perhaps too emotional. Anyway, it was never used, being superseded by later reports from the field of action.

Another weary, tense day dragged along, and that evening somebody told me that there was an Ensa show in the men's canteen. It seemed to make a farce of all our security precautions to permit these Ensa artists to come in and out, but we were all extremely glad of something to take our minds off the everlasting topic. After dinner Maxted, Bocca and I trooped along to the canteen and found a seething crowd trying to get in, while another crowd struggled with equal vigour to get out. Some of the parachutists were trying their commando tactics by swarming in and out of the windows until N.C.O.s took the matter sternly in hand.

It was all a fine tribute to Ensa, however, and it is as well to remember that a much criticised organisation did make a big effort to deliver the goods everywhere from Burma jungles to English camps. I am bound to add that the show, performed on a tiny stage in an intensely hot and overcrowded room, was one of the feeblest I have ever seen. The best that could be said is that it filled in time, but the four persons who composed this concert party seemed in conspiracy to put over every "ham" act they could think of. Things reached a climax when the violinist, who I must say was an extremely competent fiddler, had to stop after a stroke or two because her bow hit the ceiling. She then moved off the platform into the body of the hall and continued unabashed. Still, I hate to carp at people who do their duty and give their best. . . . And so we went once again to bed, wondering whether our ordeal of waiting would ever end.

Early next morning, Friday, March 23, we had our orders. We were to rise at 2.45 a.m., breakfast at 3.30 and board trucks at 4 a.m., bound for Shepherd's Grove airfield. I shaved overnight, then laid out my kit, thinking carefully what I would discard. After some thought I decided to leave behind the slab of yellow substance for colouring the sea, a precaution against falling in by daylight. Then, after further solemn thought, I also discarded the battery and little electric red light, an insurance against falling in at night. Feeling somewhat like a balloonist at a critical stage of a transocean flight who simply must get rid of some more

decided to take only one blanket and also to leave some of the heavy tins of emergency rations. My pyjamas would also have to be left, so that I need only carry the pack with a tightly rolled blanket on top and, of course, my typewriter. The pack contained toilet articles, a spare shirt, spare socks, bootlaces, and a bottle of whisky bought for £3 at the bar and wrapped lovingly in a towel.

I had a little rehearsal, wearing my trench coat with its fleece lining over the camouflage jacket, then hoisting the pack on to my shoulders, donning the heavy domed helmet and staggering down the room. It was a great effort to move, and my admiration for the real fighting men, who had to carry and use weapons, as well as all the other things, grew to amazement. I had little enough to carry but felt rather like a weedy friend of mine who, when he had first collected all his equipment as an infantryman, found it quite impossible to carry and so took a taxi to the station. I felt inclined to leave the helmet and wear my beret instead, remembering Colonel Coxen's views on the subject. However, as I should have to carry it if I did not wear it, I decided to put it on my head like everybody else.

Everybody knows what it is like trying to sleep when you have in the back of your mind the thought that you must get up early to catch a train or an aeroplane. Multiply that feeling tenfold and you will understand how we felt on that night of March 23, 1945. Your eyes closed through sheer exhaustion, all sorts of phantasmagoria raced through your tired brain. Then you awoke with a start to look at your watch and discover that, after all, only half an hour had passed. So with intervals of dozing and waking the dreadful night hobbled on. In the brief periods of sleep, hideous dreams chased through my overwrought brain.

I crawled out of bed, a demoralised wreck, at about 2 a.m., and never felt less heroic or less like plunging into battle. The hut had half emptied, various people having gone off to other camps and other airfields. Dimly lit by an insufficient number of naked bulbs, it looked more grimly depressing than ever. Garstang was up soon after me, and we went in to a half-cooked breakfast attempting to appear as nonchalant as all the other silent and preoccupied eaters. Then

we drifted out into the cheerless, draughty street where big men were clumping up and down, spectres in the ghostly moonlight, intent on the last stages of preparation.

Garstang and I gathered our belongings and lumped them to the vehicle park where Captain Brown had told us to assemble. Men were piling into fifteen-hundredweight trucks which rumbled off into the chilly night. Garstang and I did not know which truck to get into and became as anxious as two schoolboys about to miss the last possible train back after the hols. Wherever we shifted ourselves and our kit, we always seemed to be in the way. After much trouble, we at last found Captain Brown in the darkness and confusion. He told us to get into any truck, they were all going to the same place and we could sort ourselves out on the airfield. He was one of those fine, natural gentlemen who observe all life's courtesies however trying the circumstances. He did not want a non-combatant aboard his glider, but as he had no choice in the matter he treated me with the greatest friendliness and politeness.

In moments of great mental strain, impressions are alternately sharpened and blurred. My memories of that truck are indistinct except that it was icy cold and we huddled up on the floor to keep warm. We rumbled along in convoy through dark, deserted streets and presently, as the light grew, the shapes and voices in the truck resolved into human figures. To me it seemed like a Black Maria. To the men, who emerged from the shadows, it seemed—if one could judge from their banter—like a coach taking them for a day's outing to the seaside. A tall sergeant-major had been unable to squeeze a pair of gym shoes into his pack and had them dangling outside attached by the laces. Somebody started to chaff him, and the others took up the chorus as "Where's yer spade and pail, sergeant-major?"

He was a big man, in the early prime of life, exuding good health and good humour, and he smiled tolerantly at the chipping. A few hours later he was dead in a German field, with a blanket over his body. He was part of the "bonus."

We rolled on to Shepherd's Grove airfield in slow procession, with many halts and fresh starts. R.A.F. ground-

and admiration. Some of them shouted "Good luck, boys." Hundreds of gliders were drawn up, evenly spaced, in trim rows. Garstand and I debussed and found ours without much difficulty. There were mobile canteens offering cups of tea, but we dared not drink too much.

Now that I was about to die I felt strangely calm and I took one of my white tablets to make certain I kept that way. A colonel commanding Royal Engineers, known as the C.R.E., appeared on the scene, and, it seemed, was to take command of our glider and its occupants. Eighteen stalwart infantrymen of the Divisional Headquarters Defence Company were lined up and I envied their phlegmatic solidity. The Colonel, exceptionally cool and self-possessed, was the first officer I had met who did not seem dubious about taking non-combatants. In fact, he even took on another one, an R.A.F. photographer who suddenly turned up.

He studied the air photos again and then swiftly sketched out a little plan of campaign. Our hefty sergeant-major was to be first out of the glider. He would give the rest covering fire with a Bren gun, as he lay flat under the wing. Then the troops were to dash one by one for a small clump of trees which he indicated. As non-combatants, Mr. Cameron and I were to emerge last and bolt for any cover we could find. Garstang apparently ranked as a combatant and it was thought that his help as a fighting man might be needed. Both the glider pilot and his reserve—wonderful men—would also go into action with the rest.

I had screwed up my courage to the highest pitch for this effort, and the personal climax would be when we hit the ground. If I survived, then nothing would matter but preserving my skin until I could type my story. Yet, for the combatants, landing was only the beginning. They would then have to start the real job of fighting. As for the officers, they would be organising, map-reading, planning, inspiring, leading, encouraging, ordering. . . . It passed my comprehension how mortal man with human brain and frame could do these things after the cumulative mental strain of the past week.

In particular I marvelled at those with the highest responsibility—the generals and brigadiers. Unlike their brethren who command land forces, they are themselves in the spearhead of attack. They drop with their own shock troops into the shocks and fury of battle. Remote control from base headquarters is not for them. Theirs to apply calm judgment when plunging from the sky into the heat and confusion of a dog-fight on enemy territory. An illustration occurred in this operation, when Major-General Ridgway, the American Corps Commander, himself ran into a body of German troops and shot his own way out after being wounded slightly in the shoulder.

The weather was fine and clear, a perfect spring day. Any lingering hope that after all the whole thing would be cancelled by bad weather was dispelled when I glanced at the cloudless blue dome. At six o'clock official reports said that the visibility was ten miles. High above, fighter squadrons, in tight clusters, were beginning to circle, making the ears tremble with the drone.

Presently the troops filed into the glider and we, the officers and supernumeraries, followed them. We sat on long metal benches something like lavatory seats, facing each other glumly in two long rows. On each side, just above high-level, was a series of small port-holes. Seated, we could see nothing through them, and very little even when standing up. But apparently we were not allowed to stand up, for we were all ordered to strap ourselves firmly in with safety belts attached behind each seat.

It began to look as if I would not see anything, and might have better described the operation from ground-level. However, the glider pilot said that I could unstrap when we were in the air and have an occasional dekko from his cockpit. The glider reminded me irresistibly of a tube carriage. It was the same shape and most of the soldiers produced illustrated books which they began to read with avid and unnatural interest. If only they had been wearing bowler hats instead of helmets the illusion would have been perfect.

The din of engines beat through the flimsy walls and my watch pointed to 7.35 when the glider began to move

smoothly over the ground. The slight bumping of the wheels on the runway stopped and I knew we were in the air. The soldiers continued to read. I unslipped the safety belt and moved into the cockpit to stare at a long, sagging cable that hung dizzily through space and connected us with a four-engined tug. Other gliders and tugs were scattered thinly over the sky. I knew that there were about three thousand tugs, gliders and troop carriers alone, apart from fighters, in this grand climacteric airborne operation of the war, but the fleets stretched scores of miles beyond my range of vision.

The silver fighters swam above like tiny minnows, flashing in the sun. It was quiet in our glider and there was little motion. None of the troops spoke to each other. They either stared stolidly in front of them or continued to read. I wished I could feel some elation and excitement. This cold fatalism was so unglamorous; this modern cavalry charge a poor substitute for tossing plumes, flashing sabres, stampeding, snorting horses. Inside me some hundreds of butterflies were emerging from their chrysalises. So I took the second white tablet, thirst or no thirst.

Thus encouraged I popped into the cockpit again from time to time and was eventually rewarded with a magnificent sight. We had crossed over the field of Waterloo and were being joined by a second stream of tugs and gliders, carrying the Seventeenth American Division. The American gliders were pulled in pairs whereas ours were towed singly. Always, it seemed, the Yanks doubled up on everything. Their parachutists, for instance, each had two parachutes, so if one failed the other could be used. Despite this precaution I afterwards saw two cases where both the parachutes had not opened. One would have expected the bodies to be smashed to pulp. Instead they were lying there perfect with hardly a trace of blood, as if these gallant boys had died in bed. With a grievous touch of irony one of these bodies was lying beside a glider christened "Hitler's Headache."

It was 10.20 when the two streams merged. I was reflecting that we would soon be down when the pilot remarked casually to me that he could not work the landing flaps.

This should have caused shattering consternation. However, the mystery tablets appeared to be working well, for not only did I not feel sick but also I swallowed the information with Sphinx-like calm. Nor did the pilot seem worried and he observed that he would get her down all right, though it might be "a bit fast."

Somebody said that we were approaching the Rhine, but suddenly everything had become murky and ahead there was a billowing black cloud of smoke and dust caused chiefly by our own barrage.

"Strap yourself in," said the pilot tersely. "We're casting off." As I went back to my seat the R.A.F. photographer, with a strained white face, said he had seen a four-engined tug spiralling down in flames. Flak was bursting all round us, for the Germans were still manning their light anti-aircraft guns despite all our gunners' concentrated efforts to "smear them out." Mercifully we could see nothing of it, but there were muffled thuds and queer things began to happen to the glider. There was the whistling of a great hurricane.

We made sickening dives, we swooped and banked. I was petrified and even the white tablets could not keep my heart, liver and stomach in their right places. There came an almighty crash, and a wild screech of brakes, followed by a deep, deep silence. Nobody spoke, nobody moved. The sergeant-major fumbled with his safety belt with maddening slowness. We had been wiped out forty times in my racing imagination before he moved, at elephantine pace, to the door. Then he could not open it; still I sat there, mentally a human colander. After about a century he was out and lying capaciously under the wing squinting along the sights of his Bren gun. One by one the soldiers jumped out into the fog, scuttling, at the Colonel's orders, for a clump of trees. Our glider's back was broken, but none seemed seriously hurt by the crash, though I afterwards found that some had bones broken.

Once again I had slipped off the steps, but this time, it seemed, I had miraculously escaped without banging my head on the concrete.



When, after another century, the chaplain and I stumbled through the doorway, we found the Colonel standing boldly upright in a spectral world. "Run for the yellow parachute," he said sharply. We bolted in turn for a parachute which had caught in some bushes, and I wondered vaguely, even in that moment of stress, what it was doing there. The bushes, we found, marked the line of a ditch, and as I sank into it thankfully I saw a wounded American parachutist lying near, groaning. Mr. Cameron immediately began to tend him and I gave him some water. Then I crawled cautiously along the ditch and soon came across something which made me thoughtful. It was a German machine-gun post, with piles of unused ammunition belts; one of the white marks on the air photo. But where were the crew?

The mystery was solved when I peered timidly over the edge of the ditch into the newly sown field where our glider had crashed. My morale bounded at the sight of a Chicago gunman running a rival gangster along with a sub-machine gun poked in his ribs. That, at least, was the vision arising in my film-conditioned mind. Actually the figures were those of an American parachutist and a frightened German prisoner with his hands high above his head. Against a distant hedge I could see other figures lined up. Dimly I perceived that they, too, had their hands up. Parachutes were hanging limply from tall trees round about.

Still I did not fully realise what had happened; only, to my huge relief, that the war appeared to be more or less over in this part of the world. Much later I discovered that the 513th U.S. Parachute Regiment, dropped by mistake in our area shortly before we arrived, had already terrified most of the Germans into submission. I felt that this Providential error cancelled out some bombing mistakes. At least it caused the crew of that machine-gun to change their minds. The bullets which might have been inside us were lying about harmlessly on the ground.

Other sights caused horror and dismay. Gliders were lying wrecked, burning or blackened skeletons. Some, lost in the fog, had collided in the air. Others were set on fire

by flak. I saw one somersaulting like a child's toy caught in a gust of wind. God knows what happened to the men inside. It was not a bit like Megara.

Just how lucky I was to land in one piece I have only realised recently from a study of the casualties to vehicles in the drop.<sup>1</sup> Almost 50 per cent of the jeeps, trailers, carriers and light tanks were wrecked and up to 56 per cent of the seventeen-pounder anti-tank guns. The precise figure for jeeps was 140 out of 323 taken by air. About 700 men were killed and a still greater number wounded or injured. Only 88 out of 416 British gliders landed undamaged.

If wars must continue, and it seems that they will, then the human statistical and operational lessons of this drop cannot be studied too closely. Armies of the future must be largely airborne, and the Rhine drop was not merely the biggest British lift of the war, it also incorporated all the accumulated experience of previous drops. The lift was done in one comprehensive and concentrated operation, but half the airborne equipment was wiped out in the initial landings. Fortunately the link-up with the 15th Scottish Division was speedy, though not complete for twenty-four hours.

Guided by the Colonel, who, to my surprise, seemed to know exactly where he was, Garstang and I made our cautious way through the fringes of the Diersfordterwald to Kopenhof Farm, which had been seized for divisional headquarters. A certain amount of sniping was the chief hazard. Every now and then we lurked under cover as bullets whined in ill-defined directions, but all was quiet at the farm. Only Major Oliver himself had turned up of the rest of the Press party, and he with the mournful news that the Press transmitter had been smashed on landing. Nevertheless I sat down under an apple tree, put my typewriter on

<sup>1</sup> Many facts and figures about the Sixth Airborne Rhine crossing were kindly given me by Lieut.-Colonel T. B. H. Otway, of the Royal Ulster Rifles, who was writing the official War Office history of the Airborne Forces. Incidentally, Colonel Otway's own participation in the Normandy drop is one of the epics of the war. Commanding 9th Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, of whom only 150 turned up out of 600, he captured the key battery at Merville. But that is another story—described in *By Air to Battle*, the official account published in 1945, to which I have also referred.

the grass, and began hopefully, if dazedly, to write a message. A German prisoner, aged about sixteen, dug me a slit trench, to directions. My bottle of whisky, preserved intact when even three-quarter-ton weapon carriers and tanks had been mangled, stood beside me as a source of inspiration.

Roy Oliver looked on. "Well, you Press chaps are amazing," he said. I suppose he meant that I was thinking of nothing but writing the story while he was desperately anxious about the rest of the party. As it happened, I was wasting my time, for though Airborne signals tried to squeeze the message in with more urgent official ones, it never reached London.

All my colleagues turned up one by one, except Bocca and Wood. Bocca had been captured, but was released after a few days none the worse. Unluckily Wood, the bravest war reporter I ever met, was wounded in the leg and lost the limb. First arrivals were Cattle and Stan Maxted, who, though suffering from a back injury, later did a fine broadcast. Seaghan arrived after an hour or two, talkative and ebullient as ever, having had a grand battle on his own. Slowly we pierced the story together, helped by General Bols, who gave us a briefing.

Men of the Third and Fifth Parachute Brigades, in a fantasy of warfare, fell like bombs through the smoke, were rallied by hunting horns, and fought with Red Indian tactics for the woods and hills. In some instances they dropped, as predicted, on German gun positions and the gunners immediately surrendered. Parachutists told me that the feeling after landing was "so marvellous" that they were prepared to take on anything.<sup>1</sup> It is a profound pity that the men who do these superhuman acts are so inarticulate when telling their stories. One said that while hanging in a tree, he had been shot at and missed twenty-five times. According to General Bols the opposition was light, but later official accounts record pockets of stubborn fighting.

<sup>1</sup> Lieut.-General R. N. Gale, in his own story of the Sixth Airborne, says that when a parachutist touches down he "feels a king among men and this wonderful feeling of exhilaration lasts."

The most heroic exploit of that day was the headlong assault on the Issel bridges and the key village of Haminkeln by the Sixth Air Landing Brigade. I have called it a modern Balaclava, and today can think of no better-deserved description. Gliders carrying *coup-de-main* parties of the Royal Ulster Rifles and the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry were launched through the smoke into a valley of death. Many were set on fire by the torrent of light flak and burned as funeral pyres through the action. The Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry suffered terrible casualties. Unlike the Crimean Light Brigade, the Sixth Air Landing Brigade secured and held all objectives.

Although it was clear from the elaborate preparations made to receive us that the enemy had some idea of our intentions, he had not had time to set up anti-glider poles and wires in the fields. Moreover, his troops, while prepared to blaze away at sitting targets, were anxious to surrender quickly when the airborne men got among them.

Some of my colleagues with Second Army, which was swarming across the river in ferry shuttle services, reported prematurely that 15th Scottish Division had joined up with the Sixth Airborne. During a long day of continuous alarms and excursions, we at Kopenhof Farm felt anything but linked-up. There were repeated supply drops which filled the air with coloured chutes and my mind with memories of the picture *Bubbles*. Rocket-firing Typhoons came howling over the tree-tops firing madly. We hoped fervently that they had their targets pin-pointed. Rear divisional headquarters, half a mile away in another farm, was sniped at and mortared continuously. At dusk their position became so insecure that they evacuated and came over to Kopenhof. There were insufficient men to protect both places.

I filled in time by inspecting a collection of scared women and children who had been found wandering about in the woods, or hiding in cellars. A field security officer told me that nearly all were completely apathetic and listless. Some had expressed anti-Hitler feelings. Two young girls were the only truculent avowed Nazis he had found. Most of them were more concerned with the safety of their pigs,

cattle and personal belongings than with the course of the war. All they wanted to do was to go back to their farms to feed the chickens and milk the cows.

The best room in the house (which is not saying much) was given up to the R.A.M.C. A putty-faced German soldier lay on his back in the double bed, moaning his last hours away.

That night was the worst I had known since the tunnel headquarters at Leros. I tried to lie outside in the slit trench, but it was too wet and uncomfortable, so I chose the ground. The grumble of intermittent firing, rising sometimes to the roar of an avalanche, banished sleep. Danger laced the darkness all around us, where isolated bodies of German troops were stealthily moving eastwards. At 2 a.m. an officer, passing hurriedly like a black wraith, muttered an urgent warning.

"Get into the trench, the Germans are coming. Don't shoot till they're on top of you."

I obeyed the first part of his advice, palpitating. The second part did not concern me because I had nothing to shoot with. Interminable minutes elapsed. I could see and hear nothing. The alarm passed and the officer told me that a German company had been moving across our front.

A laggard, yellow dawn ended this night of horrors, real and imagined. Tension relaxed with the light and we formed a gipsy encampment with Oliver and Cattle, if I remember, as cooks. We all now shared one main anxiety, to get to cable-head across the river, which meant Press headquarters of the Second Army. While most of us watched the unusual sight of a dogfight in which the last of the Luftwaffe must surely have been engaged, Oliver, the master-mind, by some miracle acquired a German *volkswagen*.

Jessie at Lucknow, with her dream of the bagpipes, caused no more delight than our vision of a solitary crusader tank trundling along a rough track towards the farm at 8 a.m. We were relieved.

The Press party crammed into this little *volkswagen*, and we began a victory drive to end all victory drives, for our welcome came from front-line fighting soldiers as we

struggled against the swelling stream of oncoming traffic. We were bursting with pride in our red berets—for once writing men had been in front of fighting men. Across the river and back at Press headquarters, I met Christopher Buckley, who was generous in his congratulations. But I felt they were premature, for the severest test was still to come. I had to whip exhausted brain and body into writing a vivid and connected story of all that had happened. Somehow, half in a haze, I wrote two *Daily Telegraph* columns which duly appeared next morning.

Then we motored straight to Brussels. That night, in a bedroom at the Canterbury Hotel which I was sharing with Seaghan, a shaven, immaculate and refreshed Roy Oliver entered. He looked, I thought, like a plotter, and closed the door carefully.

"I'm going back to London for another airborne job. What about it, Gander?" he said.

I boggled, uncertain whether to slaughter or humour him. "No, thank you," I said. "I think I can manage without it."

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### WINDMILL TILTER

MY AMBITIOUS idea of being first into Berlin had been abandoned for many reasons. At that time it was not means certain, though it looked probable, that the British would be there first, but there were other difficulties. I was only allowed one correspondent with the Second Army, namely Buckley, and Sixth Airborne Division not a part of the Second Army.

Then there was the perpetual question of transport. A correspondent is like a tennis come-back ball, pulled tugged back by the elastic to his base. So I had been sent back to Brussels. The question was: What next? There was yet another factor. The long strain of the airborne campaign had left me neurotic, and I badly needed a respite. Buckley who suggested the solution. We were unrepresented with First Canadian Army, and he thought that it was an excellent idea if I could persuade the Canadians to take me. It was specially important to *The Daily Telegraph* to cover the campaign of First Canadian Army, which had a large British as well as a Dominion element, under command of General Crerar, should be covered.

Skelton agreed, and after about a week's rest in Brussels I tackled the job of trying, with diplomatic blandness, to become accredited to the Canadians. This job turned out to be much harder than it had seemed at inception. As correspondents had become so numerous that they facetiously said, they almost outnumbered the army in certain sectors. Eventually, I persuaded the P.R. section in Brussels to allow me to go up to the Press camp at Nijmegen on a week's visit. Such kindness and hospitality of those running the campaign that my visit was extended indefinitely. Amsterdam be-

substitute for Berlin. I was also helped greatly by the generous and accommodating attitude of John Redfern, of the *Daily Express*. He was an old and privileged resident. Instead of taking advantage of that he welcomed the suggestion that I should share his jeep. Nevertheless, we never compared stories or exchanged ideas. New codes of professional courtesy were established by the war.

Day after day we chased to and from the expanding, advancing front. In Italy our chief enemy had been dust. Here it was freezing cold, as the icy winds from the North Sea swept across flooded windmill country. We piled on clothing till we looked like Eskimos, and still we felt like two ice statues, in the windswept jeep. Sometimes we made the long trip to the southernmost sector of the Canadian front and saw the fearful destruction in Germany itself, far surpassing anything I had seen elsewhere. On the frontier there would be neighbouring houses, one flying the Dutch and the next a white flag. Then we passed into a region where all Hell's fury had been unleashed. Emmerich, where the Canadians spent three days blasting the place with high explosive and burning the enemy out with flame-throwers, was an horrific sight.

We entered it after crossing a swaying pontoon bridge 2,000 feet long, over the Rhine, one of the minor marvels of the war. Emmerich was the nearest approach to total destruction of a big town that I ever saw. Houses were ground into tumbled masses of loose bricks. Yet, such is the determination in the hearts of men, although overwhelmed by steel and high explosive, bombs and shells, the Germans built the loose bricks into new fortresses, covering cellar-entrances, and battled on. Finally they were burnt out by the devilish flame-throwers which nobody can resist.

Yet not everything in Emmerich was destroyed. Many tall chimney-stacks pointed at the sky. Though riddled with holes, they had surprisingly survived the fiercest blasts of war. Here and there, houses and shops were intact, with doors either blown in or thrown open in hasty abandonment. It was a great opportunity for looters. The frantic desire to plunder other people's property is a contagion of war which

virtue of abstention from looting because it new me. On the contrary, to load oneself up with pil junk, bound to be an embarrassment in the end as completely crazy.

However, I am in a minority. Loot is a Hindu and therefore a comparatively recent acquisition language. William the Conqueror and his baro something else. During the later stages of the wa called looting "liberating," until the word beg more than the rotting corpses under the rubble of I do not for a moment suggest that it was conf one army or nationality or that everybody join that it was fairly widespread.

In Emmerich, for instance, I went into an in shop where there were piles of goods lying about i Some had said that the Germans were short of here was the contrary evidence. A few soldiers w ing about helping themselves. What on earth want with padlocks, screws, nails and hinge imagine. It might have been utility lootin some cases, it was just a desire to do some shoplifting.

In one house, still fully furnished and a F liberators, I saw one thing that had been left-child's music still open on the piano. There wa the piano stool. The pathos of this tableau of the lesson struck home forcibly.

These closing scenes in a world tragedy somet into deepest Grand Guignol. In Zutphen, fan Philip Sidney's sacrifice more than his cavalry ch the Spanish, 1,500 Nazi youths held out for Some of them were only fifteen years old, being a German parachute training and reinforcement Their desperate, fanatical valour was unmatch majority of the mature troops pitted against the

A horrible touch was the circumstance that positions the boys had to defend was the local luna They had been snatched from various training ments, including those at Winterswijk and Mun into hastily dug trenches and given a printed ex

fight, even if wounded, while they still had strength to pull the trigger. Many of these wretched children, indoctrinated and conditioned, carried out their orders to the last.

I wonder whether I would have done the same, if suddenly whipped away from the City of London College and put into trenches in Belgium? Honesty compels me to answer like Eliza Doolittle: "Not bloody likely." The German boys fought like little devils. The cruel wasp and crocodile flame-throwers were used to subdue them in their foxholes. Even then, half-demented boys exposed themselves recklessly to fling grenades, which exploded harmlessly against the steel hulks. The Canadians had no alternative. They could not use their artillery against a Dutch town and it was imperative to cut the war short. Their justification is the same as that for using the atom bomb at Hiroshima. Anything to shorten the war and stop the killing.

All the same it was dreadful, and the thought of those boys haunted me for days; it haunts me still.

The end drew nearer. The Canadian Press camp moved to Almelo; even then, with the crumpling of all serious organised resistance, we could not reach the front in a day. One arm of General Crerar's army lunged far north and north-east into Germany, to Emden and beyond; other tentacles were reaching to the North Sea in many places, to the Zuider Zee and towards the fortress of Holland, where the towns of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam awaited their long-deferred liberation. It was the Poles who entered Emden, and one of the war's happiest coincidences was that, in their victorious sweep forward, they freed a prison camp at Oberlangen, Stalag VIc, containing no less than 1,800 Polish women. Most of these women had been rounded up at the time of the Warsaw revolt and some had been in five different camps before being concentrated in Oberlangen, near Lathen.

Practically all the German guards had fled before the advancing Poles. The first Polish soldier to arrive at the barbed-wire barricade was a grimy motor-cyclist, nearly falling off the saddle with fatigue. He was mobbed and overwhelmed with kisses by the crying, indescribably happy women. He said the Polish equivalent of: "Goddam. What

a lot of women!" A tank followed and the scenes of jubilation can be imagined.

When the main body of the Polish armoured division arrived, some of the women actually found lost fathers and brothers among them. It was a time of fairy-tale gladness. This was one of the better German prison camps and the women had no serious complaint, although food had been extremely short. They held a liberation dinner and dance, which I attended. Their own officers watched like London police-women to prevent indiscretions and enforce discipline. Nevertheless, as I departed, my headlights flashed briefly on several romantic encounters among the hutments.

German naval battalions, rushed from various North Sea ports, offered the only semblance of serious opposition to the northern drive. The chagrin and dismay of prisoners when they found they were opposed by a Polish division, with better equipment than their own, was wonderful to behold. They naturally thought that the Poles had been wiped off militarily when their country surrendered in 1939. At the headquarters of a Lieutenant-Colonel Dowbor, a Polish commander who had been captured by the Russians in Lwow and had then escaped to England, I saw a bombastic book published by the Germans in 1939. It was called *Unser Kampf in Polen*, and contained seventy-six pictures and maps, besides much written matter, to explain how the Poles had been annihilated. Their resurrection is a lesson for tyrants, in whatever guise they may come.

One incident sticks in my mind, though I cannot remember the name of the place where it happened. It was a small German town, somewhere near Oldenburg, I think. Having some spare time, I went to visit the little church. All the walls, including those of the gallery, were plastered with In Memoriam notices for men killed in the war. Most of them had died on the Russian front. Only then did I realise what the war, and Hitler's ambitions, had meant to Germany in lost manhood. There were hundreds of notices. Every family in the town must have been bereaved.

Food became the overruling consideration in the advance on Fortress Holland. Elaborate plans were made to pour in supplies of all kinds, by air, canal, road and sea, when

circumstances permitted. Extraordinary reports were reaching us in Almelo about the famine conditions in Amsterdam and The Hague. One ghoulis story was specially persistent; namely, that churches were being used as mortuaries in Amsterdam. One person, who had escaped through the lines, told me with great circumstantial detail how, in one church, the night watchman had to go round with a rattle to keep the rats away from devouring the bodies. Actually, when we finally entered Amsterdam I took some trouble to track this story down. One church, namely the Zuiderkerk, was in fact being used as a mortuary, but everything was decently and cleanly arranged, the bodies being separated by white screens. Ventilating fans sucked out the foul air, and there were huge bowls of disinfectant.

The Dutch were forced to use the same coffins over and over again. I was shown a pile of them with hinged bottoms. The corpse was taken to the grave in the coffin, then the bottom was swung open and it could be used again. Hunger in Amsterdam was largely hidden behind the brick walls, but here, in the Zuiderkerk, its scarcely human, withered victims were exposed.

To return, after this digression, to my chronological narrative. In the last days of April all fighting had stopped on the front that traversed the low country between the Zuider Zee and the Lek river to the east of Utrecht. The war was dying of inanition. When premature reports spread among the German troops that Himmler had made a surrender offer, advanced Canadian outposts heard the sounds of roystering and jubilation.

Direct negotiations were opened for sending food supplies, and a series of secret conferences were held at the village of Wageningen, between Arnhem and Utrecht. Major-General de Guingand, Chief of Staff of 21st Army Group, and Lieut.-General Bedell Smith, Chief of Staff to General Eisenhower, were the chief allied representatives. Limping two miles through the German lines to meet General Bedell Smith came Seyss Inquart, the Reichs Commissar for the Netherlands. The allied commanders had agreed that he should not be subjected to the indignity of being blindfolded, and he came, preceded by a white flag, peering anxiously through his thick

glasses. Dutch resistance men had already collared his handsome black Mercedes Benz car and handed it over to Prince Bernhard, who used it with the German number plates "RK I" still on it. Why Seyss Inquart could not use the German army transport I do not quite know. I was not there myself and so this story is hearsay, but I certainly saw Prince Bernhard with the RK I car. It was also significant that Seyss Inquart did not turn up at the surrender conference held a few days later. There was no love lost between the Wehrmacht and the Reichs Kommissar.

White tapes were drawn across a section of the Utrecht road, just beyond Wageningen, and a no-man's-land was created, in which the food trucks dumped their loads. It was somewhat futile, because a few days later the food could have been taken straight through, instead of being left to the mercies of the broken-down German and Dutch transport system. Then to facilitate final surrender, Army signallers obligingly made a telephone connection between the headquarters of Lieut.-General Charles Foulkes, commanding First Canadian Corps, and those of Col.-General Blaskowitz, commanding the Twenty-Fifth German Army in Holland.

Then, on May 5, came the surrender conference proper held in a little hotel at Wageningen. Some of the letters were missing from its name, which read "de ereld," and its windows had been shattered by shell-fire. We war correspondents were admitted to the conference, held in the bare and narrow dining-room. A long table ran the length of the room and we sat round it on wicker chairs.

Massive, grunting von Blaskowitz, my conception of the typical junker, sat opposite Foulkes. He wore a leather coat on which an Iron Cross was prominently displayed. At his hip was a revolver holster. His staff still treated him with obsequious respect; I particularly noted the alacrity with which his chauffeur leapt out to open the door of his staff car. General Reichelt, his chief of staff, also fussed around, saluting smartly on smallest provocation.

The General sat stolidly immobile, chin resting on gloved hand, words seldom escaping from his rat-trap mouth. His grim, angular face was carved out of wood and it was hard to imagine any warm human feelings for the 120,000 men

under his command. But he comported himself, in this moment of crushing humiliation, with a frigid dignity. I wondered how the genial fox-hunting type of British general would have behaved in similar circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Prince Bernhard was a few seats away from General Foulkes dressed in British uniform with Dutch insignia and R.A.F. wings on his tunic. He chain-smoked cigarettes. I had chatted with the Prince outside the conference. He was always friendly and unaffected, and spoke exceptionally good English. I remember that, back in 1940, I went to Liverpool Street station to meet Princess Juliana when she fled to England after the German invasion. The crowd cheered her warmly when she stepped from the train, followed by men carrying the baby princess in a gas-proof cradle. When Prince Bernhard came out there was a painful silence. But since then he had made great strides in popularity, and his German origin had been forgotten.

Floodlights blazed and cinema cameras whirled. We scribbled feverishly while General Foulkes read the surrender terms. One detail was that the Germans were to remain armed till moved into certain concentration areas. I thought I read some pleasure in Blaskowitz's inscrutable face. The Germans were terrified of what the Dutch resistance men would do. Finally, when disarmed the Germans were to move out across the Zuider Zee causeway.

Only once was there a sign of anything but complete submissiveness. Blaskowitz, through his interpreter, said that he had no power to issue orders regarding the food distribution. It was a matter for Seyss Inquart.

"Let it be quite clear," said General Foulkes sternly. "Seyss Inquart has no authority from now on. In the Netherlands now there is only one authority and that is myself. I am the only person who will issue orders."

The German general found it just as hard to realise as we

<sup>1</sup> Johannes von Blaskowitz, who had commanded the German Eighth Army during the invasion of Poland, committed suicide in spectacular fashion at Nuremberg gaol in February, 1948. He was one of fourteen accused in the final big trial of German war chiefs. Despite his sixty-four years and bulk, he climbed a seven-foot anti-suicide fence and flung himself on to a stone floor thirty feet below, afterwards dying in hospital from his injuries. He thus emulated Goering and cheated allied justice.



did that the Nazi power was utterly destroyed, the dissipated; that the six years' war was over. General put the final seal of fact on it when he said: 'tomorrow I move my headquarters to Hilversum yours. General Foster, who commands 1st Division will move his headquarters to your 88th General Rawlins, of the 49th British Division, will your 88 Corps.'

We realised, too, with something of a shock, how inferior in numbers the combined British and Canadian forces were on this front. Our two divisions were only two whole Corps and were outnumbered, therefore, approximately four to one. Our equipment, however, immeasurably superior in quantity and, as elsewhere, the complete domination of the air was the decisive factor. Hitler made many blunders, but none more serious when he diverted so much of Germany's production to flying bombs from fighters and bombers. The 7,000 odd flying bombs which he directed vainly against England had been translated into aircraft our task would have been infinitely more difficult.

My chief concern now was to get into Amsterdam at the earliest moment. Redfern and I discovered that some of the 49th (West Riding) Reconnaissance Regiment were to lead the 49th Division into Western Holland, crossing the white tape at Wageningen early on the morning of the 15th. To be with the 49th would be almost like ending our long time travels where they started, for I encountered the division on my first expedition abroad—to Iceland. They still wore the distinctive polar bear shoulder patch, a relic of Iceland days.

We found also that 49th Division had a slight grievance because they felt that the presence of the British element in the Canadian Army was not so well recognised by the home public. The result was that the reconnaissance regiment welcomed two war reporters on open arms. We, too, were glad to be able at last to give recognition to a regiment whose daring feats in the allied advance had had little publicity. We stayed on in attaching ourselves to "B" Squadron, commanded

Major Taite, of Lutterworth, near Rugby, which, we understood, was most likely to be first into Amsterdam.

Major Taite assigned us to a troop comprising thirty men, with four armoured Humber light reconnaissance cars and six Bren carriers. On the appointed day, by arrangement, we wedged our jeep and trailer between two armoured cars and, with this comfortable fighting escort, crossed the white tape. The reconnaissance boys were in high spirits, like schoolboys on breaking-up day. It was a lark and a picnic. None of us guessed that before the day was over it would turn into a bloody tragedy.

For me, to begin with, it was a repetition of the joyous story of liberation—Rome, Sienna, Marseilles, Athens over again. Yet this time there was a difference. Sullen, armed Germans were slinking in the background of the tulip-, lilac-throwing crowds. Dutch men and women cycling madly along on tyreless bicycles, trying to keep pace, passed grey-uniformed men carrying carbines and stick grenades.

The phlegmatic Dutch abandoned all reserve in their transports of delight. Girls leapt into the air clapping hands over their heads. People of all ages poured out of their houses wearing orange dresses, comic hats, and toppers. They flung streamers and waved flags. Big new Dutch flags, obtained Heaven knows where, floated everywhere.

In Utrecht and Hilversum the police, with difficulty, kept a narrow lane free to allow us to pass. As we rolled slowly through, lines of weeping women seized our hands and kissed them. By the old ramparts of Naarde we were bombarded with flowers and illuminated addresses. At length, after some hold-ups at blown bridges, we ran between flooded fields into the outskirts of Amsterdam itself.

These unreserved outbursts of heartfelt gratitude were too much to bear dry-eyed; the crowds grew ever more demonstrative and denser till at last our armoured cars cleaved a passage through to the Dam Square in the centre of the town. We had heard, as I have said, of the starvation and we expected the people to be begging for bread. Instead, clutching fingers all round sought for cigarettes. People begged us to satisfy their craving; I handed out what cigarettes I had, and, complacent non-smoker,

thought that this was surely the worst degradation mankind.

But it was not the cigarette cadging that chiefly worried me. Armed German troops who had apparently been street-duty formed a line and began, uneasily and sheepishly, an attempt to hold back the jubilant crowd. Their efforts were ineffectual. I noticed a few resistance men in khaki dungarees carrying Sten guns, and as the uncontrollable crowd swarmed all round and over our vehicles, making any movement forward or backwards totally impossible, I disliked the explosive situation more and more.

I spoke to our two officers, Lieutenants Bowman and Rafferty, urging that we should get out, in the hope that our withdrawal would calm the excited crowds. Easier said than done. I dragged about half a dozen laughing girls from the jeep bonnet; about twenty boys and girls were persuaded to get off the trailer. Then, having autographed about fifty identity cards, and distributed the last of my sweets and cigarettes, we struggled out to the Amstel Dijk. There, after a long interval, the other cars and carriers joined us and we cleared out of town to the quiet of a farmstead on the outskirts.

We realised that the Dutch thought the entire British Army had arrived, instead of thirty men, but we did not know till some hours later that immediately after our withdrawal a terrible massacre had taken place. It is my belief now that First Canadian Army should have immediately moved substantial forces into Amsterdam as a first priority. The hiatus gave a fatal opportunity to undisciplined resistance forces. No sooner had we left than Dutch resistance men attempted to disarm a German officer. Somebody fired a shot, whether German or Dutch will probably never be known. In ruthless retaliation, German marines, who were holding the De Groote Club buildings overlooking the square, opened fire with live ammunition on the helpless, milling mob. At least twenty people, including old women and children, were slaughtered in this panic act of brutality. Warning shots overhead would probably have been sufficient.

Guerrilla street fighting then broke out over a wide area as resistance forces poured into the open, with the weapons

that they longed to use, and surrounded the German detachments in the De Groote Club and the railway station.

Unconscious of all this, Redfern and I were meantime writing our stories, which we sent off by despatch rider. Incidentally not much of them appeared. At about two o'clock we received a radio message, still, apparently, sent in the picnic spirit: "Return to Amsterdam and put a notice on the Burgomaster's door saying that 49th Recce Regiment were the first arrivals."

We did not know whether to take this seriously. I think that, on the whole, it was lucky we did, for we were able to send an immediate report of the serious situation that had developed.

Serenely unaware of the developments in Amsterdam, I prepared for another victory ride, and, this time, sat on the top of one of the armoured cars, with a precarious hold just aft of the turret. We rolled along a straight road, and under some railway arches. But now there was noticeably less enthusiasm and people on the pavements were running about like disturbed ants. We saw another recce vehicle coming towards us and in it was a Canadian called Peter Stursberg, representing the *Daily Herald*. I was grinning at him with the infuriating superiority of the reporter who has been there first. Peter has a Sphinx face and black hair. His feelings are hard to read, but I fancied he looked slightly preoccupied.

Still I thought he was kidding when he shouted across, "Don't go in there. All Hell's broken loose."

We went on and it dawned disagreeably that, when by all the rules the war was over, I had blundered into an extremely unpleasant, dangerous situation. Streets that had been crammed with rejoicing people were now empty. Figures in blue dungarees peered from dark doorways, Sten guns in hand. The quick squeal of bullets and the savage hammering of automatics speedily convinced me that Peter had not overstated.

My victory chariot had suddenly become a tumbrel again. The worst of it was that I could not get inside and put stout steel between me and all this whistling death. There was no room. People, from safe cover, shouted advice at us not to go this way, not that. One and all were deeply concerned at

the sight of an isolated airborne type (I was still wearing my red beret) making a sitting target.

"Keep your head down, sir," shouted the English speakers anxiously. I needed no such advice, but, with a flashback to childhood, I wished I had "fluted" off when I had the chance.

We nosed cautiously through the maze of narrow streets and waterways round the Dam Square. As in the Diersfordterwald, bullets were flying indeterminately, and it was next to impossible to decide who was firing at whom or what. Unlike the Diersfordterwald, however, there were at least substantial stone buildings which might intercept a few bullets.

I wished, with Hamlet, that my too, too solid flesh would melt and make me less conspicuous. But now we had stopped, in a reasonably sheltered spot. Bowman and Rafferty held conference. Should we open fire with our 37-millimetre guns on the murderers in the De Groote Club?

Strictly speaking, it was nothing to do with me, although I had every possible objection to being a human sandbag. Nevertheless, I did venture to offer some counsel. The Germans had been allowed to retain their arms to protect themselves. We did not know who had started this business. Officially there was an armistice, and if we opened fire we would start the war all over again. Furthermore, the Germans had 3,500 regular troops in Amsterdam, besides unknown numbers of Grünpolizei. I favoured withdrawal to consult higher authority. Eventually Bowman and Rafferty, somewhat reluctantly, agreed. We withdrew to inform headquarters by radio.

As it happened the commander of the Dutch resistance forces, one Major Overhoff, who in his civilian capacity was president of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, had himself taken brave steps to end this post-war battle of Amsterdam. He entered his motor-car, and, prominently displaying a flag of truce, ordered his driver to approach the German headquarters in the De Groote Club. Unhappily the driver was shot dead and Overhoff himself had the narrowest escape. Nevertheless he did succeed in arranging a truce pending the arrival of the allied forces. The root of the trouble was that

disciplined troops but terrified of the enthusiastic amateurs.

Meanwhile we rendezvoused outside the city with Major Taite and the rest of "B" Squadron, making, as far as I remember, ten armoured cars altogether, a pitifully inadequate force to police the whole of Amsterdam. So, for the third time on that head-aching day I found myself being whisked back into Amsterdam, which I now regarded with positive abhorrence. Surprisingly, all was quiet in the darkening streets, where people dived furtively into doorways or peered from behind shutters.

We drove without incident to the Burgomaster's office in the Prinsenhof Stadhuis. Redfern and I were allowed to accompany Major Taite when he met the Dutch leaders in an oppressively dark room, where oil lamps made yellow oases amid the sombre furnishings. Major Overhoff, a quiet, calm man, was there with Mr. de Boer, the Burgomaster, and others.

I must write, unashamedly, that it was one of those moments which make me proud to be English. Major Taite had everyone's confidence and took command firmly and competently. He gave orders for the German commander, one Lieutenant-Colonel Schroeder, to attend. Within five minutes the German had arrived, in passive compliance with the conqueror's will. He took down his orders in pencil, the chief being that he must no longer keep men scattered in "penny packets," but, after curfew, move them to certain concentration areas.

At one point Major Taite said that the Germans would still be allowed to retain their arms. Schroeder's hard face, slashed with a duelling scar, beamed with pleasure. He rose and extended his hand. Taite looked at it coldly and ignored it. Schroeder sank back, nonplussed and humiliated. Strange to say, I found this incident sharply embarrassing. Schroeder looked like a man without many human sympathies; nevertheless, it is not pleasant to see a beaten foe made to grovel. Major Taite was, of course, strictly carrying out his orders.

Redfern and I, with our light-hearted French-Canadian conducting officer, Phil, moved into the foodless Krasnapolsky Hotel. Phil was in his element organising feasts with

the rations we had brought. The Dutch began celebrating in their own fashion. Forbidden to dance for so many years, they seemed to have forgotten how to do so. They crammed into halls till nobody could move and then jogged up and down in a fantastic orgy of mass motion to the strains of improvised bands. Once again I was mystified that men and women could retain such energy on their starvation rations of one ounce of meat, one ounce of bread, and, perhaps, fifteen potatoes a week. It reminded me of the Polish artist Czapski who said, recalling his experiences in Russia, that the prisoners were hungry but healthy; if we all ate less, he suggested, we should be a great deal healthier.

When the German marines were disarmed in the De Groote Club, their pistols were left in an immense and tempting pile in the lower hall of the club. One of our drivers had a passion for Lüger pistols, and scooped up a selection. When he returned to camp the old "It's not loaded" story was enacted. He was exhibiting one of his trophies to a comrade, accidentally fired it and shot him through the chest. Fortunately, the victim survived.

The British Customs authorities were eminently sensible about this matter. They insisted upon returning soldiers surrendering firearm souvenirs, although they winked an eye at many other kinds. Consequently thousands of German pistols now lie on the bed of the Channel instead of being in English homes.

My last memory of war-time Holland is the unforgettable sight of a great army in defeat and dissolution. Narrow Dutch roads were choked for hundreds of miles with crawling grey columns as the great evacuation began. The plan for a march out across the Zuider Zee causeway was abandoned, for the reason that the causeway is twenty-seven miles long and the Germans were adjudged to be capable of marching only fifteen miles in a day.

It would have been a Mikado punishment for Hitler to see his vaunted army, which, in its heyday, had swept to Warsaw in the East and the Atlantic shores in the West, during those last days in Holland—a conqueror's nightmare. The Germans marched to Den Helder, in the North Province, to be embarked in various German craft—trawlers, mine-

sweepers, R-boats and patrol vessels. They were taken to Harlingen and there disembarked, to resume their trek back on foot.

The men who came in a tornado of tanks and aircraft, the best equipped army that ever struck terror across the world, left like tramps and criminals. They were allowed ten horses and five carts for every 180 men, but only those with certified disabilities were permitted to ride. Two bicycles among every 500 men could be retained for the purposes of delivering messages. Thousands of bicycles and horses taken away from the Dutch were returned—I hope to the rightful owners. Because the Germans had been bottled up in such large numbers in Fortress Holland, we were privileged to see exodus scenes not reproduced anywhere else along the battle-front.

The crawling columns retained some semblance of discipline, but hardly troubled to march in step. Great restraint was shown by the Dutch population, who, like the inhabitants of Coventry on a famous occasion, turned their backs and ignored their late occupiers. It struck me that the Germans, though badly demoralised, were not in the deplorable condition ascribed to them by various writers after World War I. They looked well-fed, their uniforms were not ragged, and they usually had good boots.

At Den Helder every man was searched and stripped of loot before he stepped on board the evacuation craft, being allowed only one fountain-pen and one wristwatch. The piles of discarded property on the quayside and in warehouses included bicycles, sewing machines, furniture, radio sets, cases of gin, clothing, scent, and innumerable other things. Only once was there any trouble, when a German paratrooper angrily protested. A Canadian sentry fired a warning burst from his Sten gun into the water, promptly settling the matter.

Then I, too, left Holland, for Second Army headquarters at Luneberg, once more replacing Buckley.



## VACUUM TRAVELLER

AFTER the hurricane blast, the vacuum. It was world, professionally and spiritually, in which w Luneberg amid a disillusioned, shattered and Germany. We correspondents were profoundly that the slaughter was over, yet felt a deadly reac the exhilarating perils and triumphs of the chas Huxley has maintained that all news is bad, that the calamity, the bigger the news. The point is but, in any case, to condemn the reporter because his greatest opportunity in the greatest calam condemn the artist who paints a battle scene, to lawyer responsible for crime and the doctor for di

The Press camp was a little hotel in a pine-charge was Captain John Soboleff, of P.R., a Whit with an extraordinary career which is about six itself. Among other things, he won the M.C. at bridge. He spoke a fascinating brand of broken lots of it. As Buckley wrote,<sup>1</sup> sheep, chickens, fruit came to him as by magnetic attraction. But he di One of his guests was a Red Army colonel, who called Nat, and who was supposed to be representative Tass agency. These two opposites got on famously to relate. Nat was an agreeable soul and had two fame. He could drink more than all the rest together and could also beat anybody at chess. The thing was that he could combine these two achievements. Personally, I have found that even one glass of prejudice normal judgment at chess. Nat, when supplies failed, was reputed to drink the crude alcohol the Germans had used for V-weapon fuel. But un of his vodka-inflamed countrymen, whom I encountered

<sup>1</sup> In *The Road to Rome*.

Teheran, he never got cantankerous or violent. Nat was seldom detected doing a stroke of work and used to watch the antics of the rest of us with a kind of tolerant amusement. Whenever limited facilities were offered, he never attempted to claim a place and thus squeeze somebody else out. For instance, there was an occasion when we drew lots for seats in an aircraft to fly to Hamburg when Ribbentrop had been arrested. Nat declined to put his name in the hat. It may be that Nat was a Red agent. If so, I cannot think that the information he took back to the Kremlin was of much value, though undoubtedly he stored up a mass of apocryphal British anecdotes.

Incidentally, although Ribbentrop was skilfully spirited away and none of us even had a glimpse of him, I secured a minor scoop with the story of how he had spent his last hours of liberty laboriously writing in a sprawling longhand a document which he asserted was a personal message from Hitler. It was a rambling reassertion of the Nazi faith, written in such huge characters that there were only fifty words to the page. The extraordinary thing was that he, who must surely have known better, addressed it to "Mr. Vincent Churchill and Mr. Anthony Eden." It looked almost as if he were losing his wits.

The arrest of William Joyce was another sensation and, for me, another link with the early days of the war. It recalled the tedium of listening to his droning voice night after night when I was monitoring enemy broadcasts. It was my colleague Jonah Barrington who ingeniously invented the name of "Lord Haw-Haw" for Joyce. Though I, personally, never thought the name was particularly apt, nevertheless I give Jonah full marks for an idea which took popular fancy and laughed Joyce out of any credence in British homes. Now, instead of "Where is the *Ark Royal*?" it was a case of "Where is Lord Haw-Haw?" He, too, was hidden away from us, though we did catch a few glimpses of him at exercise under armed guard—the little man with the deeply scarred face, scarred mind, and colossal vanity.

We went in a body to interview "Monty," who was then using as headquarters the seventeenth-century castle of Baron von Vincke at Ostenwalde, near Osnabruck. The

Field-Marshal, who had always set the fashion among commanders by taking the war correspondents into his confidence, and utilising their services as he would those of any other branch of the Army proper, kept us waiting only a short time in a handsomely furnished room where we sat on plush chairs. I was intrigued by the pictures of racing at Epsom, Ascot, Newmarket and Ipswich with which the good baron had decked his walls; also with those of the Hanoverian kings of England. Whether these had still been on the wall during the war, I do not know for certain, but I think they had. The owner was, at that time, a displaced person living in the local Gästhof.

"Monty" (like the troops, we never called him anything else among ourselves) entered wearing light-brown corduroy trousers and an open khaki shirt. He talked in his brusque, somewhat humourless but friendly manner about many things, answered innumerable questions, seemed unwilling for us to publish anything and then, under persuasion, agreed, provided we used discretion. Nowadays much that he said seems dated and unimportant. I particularly remember the seriousness with which we questioned him, and he answered, on the subject of fraternisation, or "fratting" as the troops called it.

"My first suggestion," he said, "was that we should have some system by which a soldier when he met a nice lady could say 'Good morning' and then pass on. I discussed it with General Eisenhower, but we both agreed that, as the soldier might not pass on, this was impracticable. Then we discussed the question of allowing the soldiers to play with little children. The difficulty was to define the age of a little child. A girl of nineteen is not a child. General Eisenhower suggested under twelve, his staff said under eight. We came to the conclusion that we had far better leave it.

"If ever a nation has brought misery to millions of people it is the German nation. If you think of that for a moment I don't think you can suddenly go hobnobbing with all those frightful people."

Yet eventually the troops, who realise that you cannot reform a nation by ignoring them and whose good nature was irrepressible, found the strain of "non-fratting" in their

daily contacts too great to be endured. They fratted; first surreptitiously, then openly.

The General Election moved upon us in an atmosphere of political apathy. One unit at Luneberg tried to run a mock election, and had enormous difficulty in persuading any candidates to come forward. The first man who offered himself was a Communist, one of the fanatical minority who are ever ready to work, talk, and fight for their cause. The Colonel was horrified. Next, a Labour candidate came forward. The Colonel was only a shade less horrified. I think the sergeant-major had to speak fairly firmly to the men to get them to put forward a Liberal and, eventually, a Conservative candidate. However, the War Office got wind of it and objected that the whole thing was contrary to King's Regulations.

We, at the Press camp, listened to the party leaders' speeches with slightly more interest than the troops, but most of us had no votes. I remember that when Mr. Churchill broadcast, a visiting officer who had been celebrating a trifle overwisely and had then got caught in a thunderstorm came dripping through the door, singing

*Round and round the mulberry bush  
The monkey chivvied the weasel.*

Then he roared with laughter, unaware that he had made a zany's comment on this sudden lapse into party politics before the war in the East was over.

Second Army moved its headquarters to Bad Oeynhausien, universally referred to as "Bad Oysters," and the Press camp followed to Herford, near at hand, where we took over another hotel. I was now in that jaded mental and physical condition when one finds it next to impossible to take any real interest in life. In addition, I was suffering from a slight eye complaint called blepharitis, caused by the dust and wind of too much jeeping. I was desperately anxious to see my family again, yet wished to hang on until I had at least paid one visit to Berlin. The Russians were being awkward about admitting the allied Press to Berlin, but at last it looked as though we could go. Then, suddenly, the prospect of Berlin loomed with infinite dreariness. To be in an island,

surrounded by rubble, Russians, and disgruntled Germans became utterly repugnant.

Kindly Mr. E. F. Stowell had taken over from Skelt the office. He ended my incertitude with a welcome suggestion. It was that I should go to Brussels forthwith to cover the King Leopold abdication crisis and then come to London for leave. So to Brussels, already showing signs of that return to prosperity which has been one of the outstanding phenomena of post-war economics. It was an unsatisfactory story. Everybody agreed that, had King Leopold returned immediately after the war, he could have resumed his throne and would have been welcomed by the Belgians. As it was, the miserable business dragged on, prejudices roused, political passion inflamed, a general strike threatened. Statesmen flew backwards and forwards from the King's place of exile at St. Wolfgang near Salzburg. *The Telegraph* was exceptionally fortunate in having as its Brussels correspondent M. Paul de Landsheere, the chief of Belgian political journalists and also editor of the official summary of the Senate proceedings. He knew more of the inner workings of the crisis than anybody else. He travelled in comfortable harness. By the end of the crisis everybody who mattered in Brussels was convinced that King Leopold had only one course open to him—abdication. What tends to show that it is not merely Public Opinion which goes wrong in their predictions.

Recently, I noticed in Sir Philip Gibbs's reminiscences, *The Pageant of the Years*, that he attributes to King Leopold an exact forecast of the date on which the war broke out. He was evidently a better prophet than we, who tried to read his intentions in Brussels.

I wanted my wife to join me there, but, though my wives arrived in an assortment of uniforms and on various pretexts—every reason except that of being a wife—we were unlucky, or not sufficiently crafty. Eventually I was rescued by George Fyfe, and returned to the family bosom. The conflict between domestic and professional life is the common dilemma of the roving special correspondent. But if long separation is the curse of his existence, reunion is compensating joy.

Extended leave was granted to me while the blepharitis cleared up. I switched back to husband and father, played cricket on the Angmering sands where the rusting wreckage of the anti-tank barricade, useful only as a boundary, was a physical reminder of the tangle of regulations which surrounded our lives and seemed to throttle us.

Should we go abroad to make a new life away from this overcrowded island? Why should the accident of birth pin us down to one tiny corner of this huge and fertile globe? We knew that we were held, like Gulliver, by a hundred invisible strands—inertia, family, friendships, education, sentiment among them. At times I reflected on the dominant all-important part that chance plays in life. I, and all my family, had survived the war, and who among us would have dared predict *that* in 1939? The area in which we were living had been marked down by the Germans as an invasion beach-head, yet it remained almost exactly as it was in 1939. It might have been wiped out like one of the villages in the Peloponnese. Chance? Or Providence?

. . . . .

My travels in uniform were not yet over. In the late summer Mr. Stowell asked me to go to Rome to relieve our correspondent Martin Moore. It was the same noble city; a different world, a world of diplomacy, splinter politics, black-market restaurants, beggars, schemers, cocktail parties. One incident illuminates the situation. A friend, able to supply petrol, hired a car from a little man who drove it himself, bowing my friend in and out like an ambassador. One day the little man abruptly disappeared, having been put in prison for black-market offences.

I stayed at the senior officers' hotel, the Eden, where slowly civilian clothes were beginning to replace the uniforms. Outside, in daylight hours, an elderly woman, who contrived, most ingeniously, to preserve an air of gentility in her threadbare clothing, shuffled up and down in worn-out shoes tapping the kind-hearted brasshats for largesse. Down the street was another beggar—a horrid sight—who

had had his eyes gouged out, possibly by the Rome's fine avenues were golden with autumn leaves. The poverty, dishonesty and beggary were depressing.

Reminders of that other, war-time existence were everywhere. Often we were living in the heroic past.

The officer with the sternest appearance, loud voice and most massive figure and the biggest heart in the regiment was one Colonel Newnham, of the Royal Hampshire Regiment. So long as the British Army can produce men of sterling qualities it has nothing to fear. His gallantry which gained him the D.S.O. and the American Medal of Honor at Sidi Nsir in Tunisia is one of the epics of the war. Fortunately brave soldiers are not always fluent verbal talkers. The story of how a battalion of Hampshire Regiment, the 155th Field Regiment of Artillery held out when surrounded in overwhelming force by German tanks, and survived still has to be adequately described.

I was fortunate in meeting Lucas's smart and charming American wife, Leonore, with her transatlantic accent and English humour. She came out representing a London paper and insisted upon calling herself a "bogie" to match Luke's "bog-rat."

The doyen of all the English correspondents was Mrs. Mackenzie of the *News Chronicle*. She was bilingual, bilinguistic itself, and equipped with a delicious sense of humour.

Rome was only a stop-gap assignment. I was to return to England for another Christmas at home. After my return I suffered a grievous loss in the death of my dear mother at the advanced age of eighty. I cannot bring myself to write of her last hours. My father, his wife Maude were her constant comfort during her illness. Stanley combined this with arduous duties at the War Office, as an indefatigable air-raid warden throughout the phase of the blitzes, and also as a family man.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### LIMEY DAWDLER

IT WAS the Victory Parade through London in June, 1946, which finally severed me from war correspondent's uniform and the life it represented. I sat in the back of a jeep with my old friend of the Arakan campaign, Graham Stanford, of the *Daily Mail*, and we rolled through London on a grey, rainy day.

Some of my colleagues had backed out of this performance on grounds of modesty, but I, who had watched so many London processions, including the Victory Procession of 1919, was consumed with curiosity to know what it felt like to be part of one in my own city. So I experienced that strange mixture of shyness and glowing pleasure caused by popular applause. It was mixed, too, with a certain amount of fun, emphasised because half of life is a joke to Graham Stanford.

We assembled in Regent's Park to melancholy noises made by the howling gibbons, a substitute for the bagpipes. Momentarily we were dismayed to find that we had been sandwiched between a mobile laundry and mobile canteens; then we took it as a compliment to our strictly practical "Chocolate Soldier" attitude.

It was typical weather and a typical English tribute. None of the madness of Rome, Athens or Amsterdam; just the warm applause of disciplined crowds and a sense of heartfelt thankfulness.

The Parade was also important to me because it marked the reopening of the B.B.C. television service which had been suspended on the outbreak of war. I was overjoyed to find that all my original enthusiasm for this fascinating new medium of entertainment, art and education had revived white-hot. This settled many doubts and difficulties.



It was easier for me to turn my back on foreign problems and settle down to an expanding future at home. Yet my problems were not over.

One day I happened to be lunching at Claridge's. While waiting for him to arrive I met another old and important friend, Ed Murrow, of the Columbia Broadcasting System of America. Ed was a broadcaster of outstanding ability and bravery, whose friendliness to this country was most helpful. His account of a Berlin bombing raid was long remembered as a journalistic and broadcast masterpiece *de force*.

As usual, Ed was extremely busy and pressed for time. When he saw me, his dark face lighted with a brilliant and dazzling smile for which he was famous. "When are you coming over, Marsland? When're you coming over?" he inquired.

"When you invite me, Ed," I said.

"Why, sure, we'll do something about it," he said vaguely, and then trailed off into the lift, surrounded by a cloud of bell-hops, secretaries and camp-followers.

I did not think he would, but, sure enough, a month or two months later a letter arrived at the office, beginning "It is a helluva time to be writing to you" and ending with the suggestion that I should ask Lord Camrose to come to America to look at Columbia's coloured television. The letter was something of a challenge. I had written the *Daily Telegraph* that Britain led the world in television. Ed invited me to say whether I still thought that Britain led the world after seeing their colour. Ed had risen to giddy levels in his organisation; he was vice-president in charge of public relations.

My ambition to visit the United States had always been there and I dared not think that this was the opportunity long sought. It seemed too safe and easy; this was not a sea or airborne drop, no destroyer cruise in the tropics, no trek through pestiferous jungle.

Lord Camrose, who was himself visiting the United States on the maiden voyage of the *Queen Elizabeth*, most graciously agreed to my journey. While still hardly believing

luck, I felt immensely grateful. As ever, in this life, feelings of joy were tinged with some disappointment. It would have been marvellous to take my wife, but owing to my dollar situation this was impossible. Then I would have liked to travel in the *Queen Elizabeth*, but her first-class accommodation was full. Eventually I decided to sacrifice slow luxury for potential speed. I flew from London Airport in a Liberator of British Overseas Airways. When I stepped out on to the airport in Newfoundland which bears my name, after sitting up all night in the air-conditioned cabin, I was sick. A fine way for Gander to christen Gander.

This confusion of names puzzled many people. I sent a cable to my wife reading "Love from Gander. Gander," causing the cable clerk to scratch his head. The B.O.A.C. people crossed my name off the passenger list, thinking it was a mistake, and causing Alex Faulkner, our energetic and hospitable New York correspondent, to cancel my hotel reservation. We took off from Gander, circled over a country of lakes and forests exactly as I had imagined it to be, when one of the engines conked out and we landed again. Gander obviously had a fatal attraction for Gander, and I began to doubt whether I should ever get away. Then, after hours of delay, the Liberator did finally wrench itself free and break the magnetism.

La Guardia airfield, New York, is a back-door entry to a city designed to impress visitors who come by sea. There is no skyscraper profile, no Statue of Liberty, no harbour—only midgets playing golf, gloomy building blocks, and an airport like a score of others. It is taking an unfair advantage of New York to arrive at La Guardia. Some day, perhaps, the city will be rebuilt to show off to the air traveller. I felt I had come in at the tradesman's entrance.

Then New York began to stab, flog and batter me with impressions. Europeans have complained for a century that the Americans boast of the bigness of everything. But everything *is* bigger—faster—madder. I had moved overnight from Liliput to Brobdingnag, from a quiet country town to a Babylonian fun-fair, from cool rooms to over-

A shining red and yellow cab, twice the size of its London brother, sped me along immensely wide highways over mammoth bridges. Somebody said that America, racially, is an advance copy of what the whole world will be one day. A negro put my baggage in the cab. My driver said he was Italian. Both seemed so independent that I was surprised when they did what I asked them to do. So, in the first few minutes I had experience of some of the chief characteristics of the United States—the mixture of races which has already produced ONE race and a sturdy independence of the average citizen.

Sometimes, we Europeans think, the Americans take this attitude too far. One can enter a palatial hotel and has everything from a doctor's and a dentist's surgery, a princely ballroom and meet with nothing but routine at the reception desk. A Czech barber, who, while shaving my hair, gave me a lecture on how to assert myself in the United States, pointed to a boy who had just entered the shop and was having his shoes cleaned. He was sprawling arrogantly in the chair, one leg over the arm, chewing and reading a comic paper. A large negro was groveling on his knees cleaning the boy's shoes. I told the barber of a British public school a boy who behaved like that and probably be beaten for bad manners, adding that I thought slavery had been abolished.

My taxi-driver not only proved much more capable than I supposed he would; he was positively omniscient. He answered all questions and solved coinage difficulties. I found they were nearly all like that, but their ignorance of England was abysmal. They did not even know that we still had rationing. Unlike the taciturn London taxi-driver, the New York taxi-man is conversational and volunteers unexpected bits of news at you, sometimes interlarded with philosophy. "So-and-so's dead. Reckon that's the one thing he couldn't dodge." (I have not the faintest idea who so-and-so is, but grunt sympathetic agreement.) "You're English, aren't you? The Empire's cracked, isn't it?" I register faint dissent. And so on.

Another surprise was the large percentage of foreigners in the streets who obviously have some dark blood

veins. An advance copy of the human race as it will one day be? Perhaps, when speed of travel has nullified the effect of climate and geography, when negroes, Indians, Chinese and Europeans have merged, through inter-marriage, into a common breed.

The most engaging quality of the American is friendliness, the most formidable his energy, the most admirable his kind-hearted generosity.

Those Europeans who judge Americans by the behaviour of some G.I.s—and some officers—abroad are profoundly mistaken. Severeid called it "loutish." I would call it, in some cases, boisterous and schoolboyish.

When I met so many subdued, courteous, and temperate people in the United States I could hardly believe it. But then I remembered that the Englishman on the Continent is proverbially a figure of fun, and that, in India, many of the Indian inhabitants used to complain bitterly about the conduct of British temporary residents.

Americans are apt to be sensitive and resentful if friendly advances are received coldly. I remember that, in Teheran, an American flier and I had been having a drink, and we were getting on famously. Then suddenly he asked me to join some ridiculous "chain" club—the Short Snorters—which involved signing my name on the back of a dollar bill, and parting up with dollar bills to two or three other people in the group. I politely declined, and he was extremely annoyed. He produced a whole string of dollar bills, stuck together, bearing masses of signatures, and lectured me about the sentimental value of this personal souvenir. He intended to stick it on the wall at home, much like an Old Blue fixing his oar up in his study.

Suspicious frigidity is intensely annoying to Americans. If the Russians genuinely seek friendly relations with the United States their diplomatic methods are singularly inept.

One thing apt to irritate English people is the American habit of wearing hats indoors. It is absurd that we should take offence at this slight difference in manners. In India, my bearer was supposed to wear his hat and take his shoes off when he entered the room. It was a sign of respect.

If he came in with his shoes on and his hat off, he invited a kick in the pants. Graham Stanford, I remember, caused a European mutiny in a block of flats in Calcutta because he refused to reprimand his bearer for persistently entering the room with his hat off. It was dumb insolence, they said. The bearer had been a ship's steward and was aping European manners.

Finally, there is this question of "loudness," in dress and talk. Most of us have been to parties where everybody is talking loudly and we, too, have to raise our voices to be heard. As a radio engineer might say, the noise level is higher in the United States, and, as we all speak to be heard and understood, it is necessary to "turn up the wick."

New York's glittering hotels were intensely overcrowded and were spewing visitors out on to the pavements. Nobody was allowed to stay longer than three days. I shared a room at the Devonshire, on West 55th Street, with two other members of *The Daily Telegraph* staff, Francis Whitmore, our city editor, and Jack Frost, our shipping correspondent. Two more genial and accommodating persons do not exist on the staff of the *D.T.* I know this because it was my objectionable practice to rise at six o'clock in the morning and switch on the radio. Not one squeak of protest did it raise, although it meant that we were bombarded with exhortations to buy this and that. "I love my husband and I love my baby and I love my biscuits sopped in gravy," chanted the radio. I was deeply sorry for Frost and Whitmore, but I had so little time, so much to hear and to do.

Whitmore returned good for evil by taking me to see the skyscrapers by night. I have seen the Taj Mahal at sunrise, the Pyramids and the Nile by moonlight, the floodlit silver Parthenon, the Colosseum—the noblest monuments of East and West. Nothing compares with the New York skyscrapers. I had expected them to be meanly huddled, gashed with the dark canyons of the streets. Instead they had the spaciousness and majesty of a mountain range. "Man-made cubist mountains," I called them in a broadcast over the Columbia network. At night the lights made them luminous ladders to the stars, while wisps of steam from hidden apertures at street-level turned the picture into a

vision of William Blake. By day they were slender pencils with the elegance of Mogul minarets.

I had not come to sight-see or to star-gaze in the astronomical sense. Ed Murrow, the only man in New York who kept his room at a reasonable temperature, arranged for me to see a demonstration of Columbia's coloured television in their building on Madison Avenue. It was impressive, but, as their system incorporated a mechanical element, I came to the conclusion that coloured television, as a practical proposition, was still many years away. This view was later upheld by the Federal Communications Commission.

Among those present at this demonstration was the Duke of Windsor, to whom, at that moment, the more vulgar American newspapers were unkindly referring as the "baggy-eyed Duke." I had a chat with him afterwards, and it turned away from television to the question of education, a subject in which the Duke is deeply interested. He said that, in his opinion, if a boy was to be partly educated in a foreign country, the best arrangement was for him to go to school in his own country and then to the university abroad. To go to school abroad and then to the university at home might be upsetting, he thought.

Reverting for a moment to coloured television. When will it come? Later, during my visit I saw the electronic coloured television of the Radio Corporation, demonstrated at their Princeton laboratories.

This was not so advanced as the Columbia system, but, I thought, a more practical method and possibly the ultimate answer. The R.C.A. experts reckoned that coloured television would be perfected in four years' time, namely 1950. My feeling is that they were optimistic. I do not believe that we shall have transmissions in colour here for ten years, though it may be perfected in the laboratory before then.

Looking at television and radio stations, listening to broadcasts till they nearly drove me silly, I visited Philadelphia, Schenectady, Hollywood, Chicago and Washington—all in four short weeks. Television had already reached all these places, and in its extension the Americans had us

beaten. On programme presentation and the development of studio technique, however, we were still ahead.

The process of extending television in the United States has gone on rapidly since then, and the Americans have shown their national genius for getting things done, getting on with the job. While we still have only one station, that at Alexandra Palace, with a second one building at Sutton Coldfield, the Americans now have over seventy working and numerous others in various stages of construction. Our slowness cannot altogether be accounted for by post-war shortages and difficulties. There has been a lack of decision and forceful drive at Government level. Our world leadership in television development, undisputed from 1936 to 1939, has gone, if national coverage be the only test. There are, however, other considerations; not merely the quality of programmes but also that of receivers and progress with laboratory research. On these matters, Britain is still holding her own.

Interviewed by several newspapers in my wanderings—they called me “the ruddy-cheeked visitor”—I boldly predicted that sound radio was moribund. Judging from its diversity, inexhaustible quantity, and booming prosperity, that prognosis seemed absurd. Today, American radio pundits have come to my way of thinking.

My chief feeling about U.S. radio was profound thankfulness that Britain had avoided commercial sponsorship. The “singing commercials” touched an all-time low in banality, and the unending “soap opera” serials (which inspired our “Dick Barton”) and all-time high in childishness. Nevertheless, the bigness of American radio, its endless variety and colossal quantity gave it a magnanimity and liberality exceeding that of the B.B.C. I am not referring to the gifts showered upon participants in “quiz” programmes, ranging from aeroplanes and fur coats to diamonds and free trips round the world. I mean that, in the recent presidential election, *all* the candidates, including the vegetarian and the Socialist Workers’ leader, were able to broadcast their views from coast to coast. Almost any crank or prejudiced politician can get a hearing.

The American radio will freely talk about nudity or

Jew-baiting and give debates fighting reality. They are not squeamish about opinions; on the other hand, "blue" jokes with a double meaning, the delight of certain British comedians, are rigorously barred. In music, the Toscanini concerts of the National Broadcasting Company equal anything that the B.B.C. has to offer.

It is a great dispensation of Providence that the English language is spoken on opposite sides of the Atlantic with a different accent. The U.S. radio has endless fun with it, matched only by the fun that we have with the U.S. accent. In a New York theatre one night Faulkner nudged me and whispered that a couple behind, presumably from the Middle West, were exploding, in paroxysms of silent mirth, every time I opened my mouth. I was delighted to amuse them so easily.

In a Hollywood studio I arrived rather late and had to push into a vacant seat. It was a quiz programme of the type that specialises in practical jokes. A boy in the next seat looked at me eagerly and said: "Say, are you a gag?" "No," I said. "Just an Englishman."

My visit to Hollywood was unique in British journalism because I went to it as a radio and not a film centre. The trip had the private virtue of an immensity tour, for I flew by day and night over the deserts, mighty rivers, futuristic towns, farmlands and mountains of this wonderland, America. Cities seen from the air at night are my most vivid memories. They reminded me of a fabulous gold chess-board, with jewelled pieces, which I once saw in Old Delhi. Red, white, green and blue sparkled below; rivers of light from car headlights poured along the straight roads. Sometimes the Arabian night was transformed into the wrath of Hell, as when we flew over the furnaces of Pittsburgh and their angry glow was magnified a hundred-fold on the clouds. Distant towns were an aurora on the horizon.

The Americans are the finest propagandists in the world for their own country because they boost it with a song. How eagerly I searched the moving map below for the Mississippi where those boats went puffin' along. Then it was "California, here I come," stopping at Salt Lake City



of the Mormons and Conan Doyle, and over the forbidding Nevada desert to Las Vegas, the Mecca of our modern polygamists. Las Vegas, second only to Reno as a place of easy divorce, is also a gambling centre. I claim to be one of the few people who ever made a profit out of Las Vegas. While waiting at the airport I put a coin into a one-arm bandit (American for fruit machine) and out fell a shower of silver coins. Then I stopped playing.

Hollywood at last, and I stepped out of the airliner to break the dark spell of stuffy cinema illusions in its brilliant sunshine. It was a queer visit. I did not enter a single film studio. In the first place, there was a strike of technicians in progress and their pickets barred the entrances. Secondly, my interests were radio and television. Few people outside America realise that radio is the second industry of Hollywood. The two biggest networks, N.B.C. and Columbia, set a standard in the appointments and accommodation of their radio theatres. Crowds, crazy for free entertainment, swarmed to these theatres every night. Bobby-soxers, crazy with hero worship, brought their birthday cakes and autograph albums, their adulation and their modern equivalents of frankincense and myrrh, to the stage doors.

The N.B.C. guide who, with untiring courtesy, showed me round, spoke of the film and radio stars as we speak of royalty. Clark Gable was "gracious," Bing Crosby was "difficult to see." I met Jack Benny, who during the war had given me a lift from Alexandria to Cairo in his plane. He had not the faintest recollection of having met me before. Even when I reminded him of his crack about Shepheard's hotel ("The only hotel in the world in which, when you put the lights on, it gets darker") he did not seem to remember. I saw Schnozzle Durante rehearsing, with a frenzied concentration worthy of a better cause. All his energies were centred upon repeating a "puff" line of verse, which he eventually recited like Henry V at Agincourt. I forget what proprietary product was to benefit from this performance. A pity, because if I remembered I would give it the benefit of this extra free publicity undoubtedly merited by the prodigious efforts of Mr. Durante.

Hollywood, where the stars live in regal splendour and where a swimming-pool is a mark of respectability like the aspidistra in Bow, had its poor and homeless people, too. The young Canadian driver of the car which took me to the stupendous Ambassadors' Hotel told me that he and his wife were living in a trailer outside a "rooming house" where they had their meals and occasional baths.

To the madness of Hollywood there are no limits. N.B.C. were preparing for the annual Santa Claus parade, a lavish spectacle on Mardi Gras lines. Some smart publicity man then read that it was possible, by dropping ice pellets from an aircraft on the clouds, to start an artificial snowstorm. He knew that, for various reasons, this would be impracticable—for one thing the clouds could not be guaranteed on the right day. Nevertheless, as a publicity stunt—intending to put the story round to the Press—he asked the originators of this idea for detailed plans. To his consternation he received a reply which took him seriously. The publicity stunter's mood rapidly changed from glee to consternation. He imagined the sky black with aircraft, bombarding the crowds with ice, slush and snow which would land the N.B.C. with a bill of half a million dollars. He panicked and cancelled this inquiry.

He was explaining all these convolutions of ingenuity, with many chuckles, to a Hollywood journalist in my presence when the journalist, with a puzzled air, said: "Well, what *did* you intend to do?"

Another sign of lunacy is that the taxi-drivers pass red lights. The red light is regarded as a signal to accelerate and they rush past at breakneck speed to avoid a collision. I asked one why he did not stop, and he said: "Waal, it's only a kinda warning." I said: "That's what I thought."

My kind host of the N.B.C., though deeply perturbed and wondering whether *I* was quite sane because I said I did not particularly wish to meet Bing Crosby, took me to the sumptuous Brown Derby restaurant. Film and radio stars, half of them unknown to me, clustered there in dazzling constellations. There were White Dwarfs, female spiral nebulae, and crazy comets.

The Ambassador's, where I stayed, was more like a town

than a hotel; it even had a miniature golf course in the grounds. In its bars congregated people who boasted about the princely sums for which they just sold scenario scripts to Warner Brothers or Sam Goldwyn. Another form of bragging peculiar to Hollywood came from men who claimed to have been in the U.S. Marines during the war. Some of these men were also peculiar in another respect.

The boundary between the land of make-believe and everyday life is invisible in Hollywood. There is something in California's climate and atmosphere which encourages every kind of exotic mental growth and extravagance. Take religion. The Sunday papers advertise the services of innumerable strange sects with weird names. I picked out what seemed a fairly normal religious institution, the First Baptist Church. The building was more like a movie palace than a church. It even had upholstered tip-up seats. The choir comprised little blonde girls in dainty white taffeta dresses, wearing big black bows. I expected the organ to rise up out of the floor, but, in this respect alone, I was disappointed.

After the service mothers collected their babies, who had been parked in a special nursery in charge of a uniformed nurse, and then they drove off in high-powered cars down the magnificent palm-lined boulevards. It was all centuries removed from the medieval austerity of the Bow church of my childhood. Religion, in its diverse forms, flourishes like everything else there. The church was so packed it was hard to find a seat, and, incidentally, it was also a fashion parade.

Evelyn Waugh, in his satire *The Loved One*, has dealt with another aspect of the emotional riot—the "splendid elaboration" of the cemeteries.

I motored one misty day to the Pacific coast, not merely to emulate stout Cortez, but to see the famous breakers where Mack Sennett's bathing girls disported, and the rambling house of the world's sweetheart, Mary Pickford. It took me back again to childhood, and to the dark, sweet-scented cinemas of Stratford and Forest Gate where the customers were alternately served with cups of tea and sprayed with disinfectant. Curious that, in those days, my imagination never projected me to those Californian beaches

in person. I was content to be ravished by the beauty of female form for sixpence.

Everything, I have said, flourished in Hollywood. There was one notable and curious exception. That was television. Although both Don Lee and Paramount had experimental stations, they televised only two or three times a week, and, search as I would, I could not find a single privately owned television set in the whole affluent town. I went up to the Don Lee station in the Hollywoodland range and came to the conclusion that B.B.C. facilities at Alexandra Palace were far superior. Although the radio, and certain film interests, had big plans for establishing a ring of stations on Mount Wilson, no progress had been made with the scheme. Hollywood, like the Martians in Wells's *War of the Worlds*, was arrogantly indifferent to the little germ that might bring about its downfall.

My failure to discover any dynamic interest in television caused me to cut my visit short. After only four strenuous days I flew to Washington, by way of Chicago. Then there came a moment when, far from the rainbow extravaganza of filmland, I stood under the fine dome of the Jefferson memorial, with the quiet waters of the Potomac gliding by, and I read the inscription above me: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal, hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Then I felt, at last, nearer to the soul of America, nearer to understanding this multitude of races and countries under one flag.

Another lesson came when I was visiting the Smithsonian Institute, irreverently called "Uncle Sam's attic," one of the world's finest museums. Several times I asked different people, both curators and visitors, which was the principal exhibit. Invariably, I was told "Lindbergh's plane. 'The Spirit of St. Louis.'" It was American worship of guts and energy, their preference for the present over the past. Readers may object that many Americans have a positive mania for old things and rare works of art, that the average American knows far more about his ancestors than the average European. True, but all these things are hobby-horses. He admires courage and achievement more than anything in this world. I hear another faint dissentient

voice: "How about the almighty dollar?" The dollar is the symbol of achievement and strength; strength through competitive effort.

In his heart, the average American is still a pioneer fighting Red Indians and primitive country. The social anthropologists tell us that his sentimental streak and other characteristics are traceable to the dominant part that women play in his upbringing; the mothers, wives and women teachers of the U.S. On this reasoning, the fact that I have myself had women teachers may account for my admiration of Americans.

A British Socialist Minister, the other day, said that since he had been in that job he had become convinced it was better to earn your living with your coat on. He had himself been a manual worker. I am completely out of sympathy with this attitude, and I would remove my coat or any other garment if I thought it would help me to get on with the job. The American's willingness to take off his coat on any and every occasion is an earnest of his determination to get things done and discard anything that impedes him. It is also a result of overheating buildings.

"They" said that Bing Crosby was difficult to see; "they" said that Petrillo, the boss of the Musicians' Union who had forbidden musicians to play in television programmes, was difficult to see. I tested this second theory and found it correct.

There was one man in the United States who was *not* difficult to see. That was Mr. Harry S. Truman, the President. Malcolm Muggeridge, then our Washington correspondent, suggested that I should attend one of the famous Press conferences in the White House and I passed with awe through the portals of that unpretentious building, in English renaissance style, that houses the most powerful man on this planet. The modesty and homeliness of the White House, the aura of simple dignity, contradict those widespread ideas of flamboyance and bombast supposed to be inseparably America. I thought, as I entered, of Viceregal Lodge in Delhi, that palace in red and white stone which outrivalled all the dwellings of Indian maharajahs and stood in stupendous splendour

symbolising the British raj. Here was a paradox, the British overstatement and the American understatement.

Police and officials interrogated me, but were courteous and soon satisfied. In an outer room—as usual heated to the temperature of a hot-house at Kew—Press men of all nations sprawled about and discarded their topcoats (overcoats) in a disorderly pile on a table.

Presently we were ushered into the bare conference room. Leonard Miall, the B.B.C. correspondent in Washington, had kindly taken me in hand, and—the hospitable Muggeridge being preoccupied with a story—had advised me on various unwritten laws. The casuals, like myself, had to be treated as a separate class and were herded in after the regulars. My chief surprise was that everybody was standing, and in a comparatively small room. I should guess that there were at least a hundred, perhaps more, in this room. Being wedged at the back, I could not even see the President.

Another surprise was the flippancy of the proceedings. Possibly it was something to do with the fact that neither Press nor nation were, at that time, taking their unelected President as seriously as they should have done.

I heard the President's firm and even voice saying, with less accent than I expected, that he could not answer any questions on the coal strike. As that was the one thing everybody was keen to ask about, there was a hoot of laughter. Then other reporters, of various nationalities, began to ask questions, and on the lightest provocation the whole conference quaked with mirth. Miall had warned me that, as a visitor, I must not put any questions. When at last these hilarious but somewhat unproductive proceedings were over, Miall caught me by the arm and asked if I would like to meet the President. If so, he advised, I had better hang about until everybody had cleared out, then it might be arranged.

The reporters thinned out, chattering and smiling like an audience dispersing from a theatre. Then Malcolm Muggeridge, from whom I had been separated in the sheep-and-goats sorting, came forward and introduced me to an intermediary, who, in turn, presented me to the President.

Awe-struck, I found myself shaking hands with a grave and courteous little man. We exchanged some commonplace pleasantries. What can a man with global responsibilities say when he suddenly meets a journalistic nonentity from abroad? One of the unwritten laws in which Miall had instructed me is that these conversations are private, but I assure any disappointed readers that if I did print the conversation the world would be little wiser.

What, then, is gained by such a personal contact? I find a ready answer: Everything that is lost by the God-like inaccessibility of Stalin. Cynics may despise the American democratic touch, but at least it is warm, friendly, reassuring—the cement of human relations.

To Mr. Truman it is a religion, and I felt that I was speaking to a man of deep sincerity. British visitors liked Mr. Truman's humility—a quality little appreciated by some of his fellow-countrymen.

One of the natural wonders of the world is that residents in the White House, from Lincoln to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, have always tended to grow in moral stature. Today, triumphantly elected by the nation, Harry Truman can be seen by all. The whole world has been introduced to him.

This was the high-spot of my rapid American tour, but before I flew back to England I gave my broadcast over the Columbia network. Trying, somewhat hopelessly, to compete with soap opera, I called it "A Limey in Wonderland." There is an immense difference in atmosphere between a B.B.C. and a U.S. studio. Recently I gave a B.B.C. broadcast, which had been greatly improved by the hard-working and conscientious producer. Afterwards he came in with an air of pleased wonderment and said: "We finished exactly on time."

In America I was told that I could say exactly what I liked, nothing would be touched, but the programme must finish on the split second. An announcer-producer sat opposite me, simulating amusement and interest, and making motions to indicate if I were going too fast or too slow. To go faster he signalled with a winding movement; slower, by drawing an imaginary piece of elastic between

two fingers. If exactly right, he put his fist on his nose to show that I was "bang on the nose." The instant the broadcast was over, the telephone rang and Helen Sioussat, the Talks Director, was on the line with congratulations.

These methods have a stimulating and a warming effect; they are the electricity of U.S. broadcasting. It is true that the electricity became forked lightning next minute, when they told me that there would be a large income tax reduction from my "honorarium." But I was soothed again by being assured that, in American radio, it was most unusual to be paid; most people themselves paid large sums for the privilege of being heard.

To end this chapter, I have listed some bizarre trivialities which amused me though they were no more important than sparks from a furnace. Anyway, they are all things which I had never seen before anywhere else in the world. Here they are:

The sight of a fashionably dressed woman leading a pet deer on a string along the busy pavement of East 55th Street.

This study in two victims of circumstances—a down-and-out, asleep on his feet, leaning against the bars of a gorilla's cage in Central Park.

A drunk, being given the bum's rush upstairs by a cop at Schenectady railway station and miraculously landing on his feet on the right platform.

A bearded blind man, dressed like John the Baptist, selling pamphlets on Fifth Avenue denouncing British Imperialism of the eighteenth-century brand.

The gift of a teaspoonful of peanuts ladled out by a small boy outside a shop as an advertising stunt.

The dirigible, which circled over the skyscrapers, with advertisements and news flashing round its gasbag.

The bacon and eggs, delivered in a brown-paper parcel piping hot, in my hotel bedroom on a Sunday morning. (The kitchen staff did not function on Sunday morning and the porter apparently produced this out of slot machines.)

The air-line hostess, typical of her charming sisterhood, who comforted a frightened child during a rough crossing



of the Sierra Nevada. I wished she would come and comfort me.

My final memory of New York was when I delivered a tactful box of candy to Ed Murrow's extremely helpful secretary. She was amazed when I told her where I'd been. "My, don't you Englishmen get around," she said. She had hardly ever been outside New York, and, certainly, never to California.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### HOMING VOYAGER

So, APPROACHING the end of half a century of life and a quarter-century of intermittent travel, I see my experience as a quaint mosaic in the Museum of Memories. When I try to read the purpose of the artist and the meaning of the symbolism, I find myself in the greatest perplexity. I am not even certain who, or what, *is* the artist. The uncompleted picture looks like chaotic impressionism.

It would give meaning and purpose to my life if I could pretend that, twenty-five years ago, I set out to look for my own Shangri-la—a haven of bliss where life and the arts flourish, protected from the turbulent seas of human strife and greed. The truth is that when I began my travels Mr. Hilton's *Lost Horizon* had not been written to sow the idea in my mind. In any case, his conception of a monastic safety-first Elysium, set in a gloomy lunar landscape, would have repelled me.

My idealism was tempered with a craving for excitement, change and movement. Boredom was my greatest enemy, as I believe it to be of most civilised men. They fight it in various ways, beginning with cocktails and jazz and ending in war. When I first went travelling, young people were shaking violently to the Charleston and the middle-aged with fright at the prospects of a devastating air war. Today, when, like a comet in successive eccentric orbits, I have returned to my starting-point, the young shiver still more violently to jive (or whatever they call it) and the middle-aged at the prospects of atomic extinction.

One personal moral can be drawn immediately, namely that there are two ways of observing the recurring cycles of life—one by letting the land and sea roll under you, and the

other, in the manner of Gautama under the lotus tree, by letting the years roll past while you stay in one place. Today, when I look at my television screen, I realise that, by the marvels of science, it is now possible to combine these two hitherto opposing ways of life and to extract some of the best from two worlds.

However, it was not idealism in any form which started me on my travels, only a sense of logic and a blind ambition. Books told me that, though this is the sea planet, its land surface covers 55,786,000 square miles. There is an extreme range of climate, from ice-caps to the torrid equator, and an unbelievable variety of scenery, from arid desert to steaming mangrove swamps. Yet, apart from a few odd types like gypsies, sailors, tramps, and commercial travellers, the great majority of the world's 2,000,000,000 inhabitants are rooted like plants. True that living things which move least live longest—like trees and tortoises—but who, at twenty-two, wants to live to a hundred?

I suppose I had also noted that there are some peculiar people who cadge their way round the world on various preposterous pretexts, such as hopping, cycling, crawling, going on stilts and even motoring (I once interviewed a man in Bombay who claimed to be circumnavigating the globe in a car. He had covered most of the distance in ships). It dawned upon me that the profession of journalism was a marvellous solution of the travelling problem. Like Columbus, Odysseus and one or two other historical wanderers, I could find somebody to finance me, and, unlike them, would not be bothered with faithful swincherds or mutinous crews. Thus, by this simple solution, I have been able to travel almost everywhere first-class—resorting with extreme reluctance and distaste to such locomotion as camels, U.S. jeeps, Shanks's pony, rickshaws or Arab dhows.

When I set out, unlike those worthy types who sought the Golden Fleece, the Golden Gate, the elixir of life, and the philosophers' stone—I had only the vaguest idea of my ultimate objective. Primarily, I was looking for some agreeable way to earn a living in some agreeable place. This was my adolescent idea of the happy life. Bernard Shaw says that the secret is to be so busy doing the things you

like that you have no time to ask yourself whether you *are* happy. That may be true for Shaw and all ascetics, but for the ordinary man, who likes the fleshpots, it is a doctrine of early death. Personally, I would amend it to "doing the artistic and creative things you like," whether you be Michelangelo at work on some immortal masterpiece or a farmer ploughing a field.

But even then it would only be half an answer to the question: "What is the secret of happiness?" Mental bliss depends more upon companionship than environment, more upon the state of mind than upon living in the right place and circumstances. Once, in my travels, I did approach close to the physical reality of Shangri-la, and in this place I found a man who looked supremely happy.

It was where the Snowy Range of the Himalayas slashes across the sky in its awful grandeur, an Olympus of gleaming peaks and desolate valleys. I had ridden up the spiral road from Darjeeling to a monastery on the borders of Tibet. The lamasery was an ornate and ageless one-storied building. It consisted mainly of a large common room, with a curtain across the doorway. I drew the curtain back hesitantly, for there was no bell to ring or knocker to knock.

Then, abashed, I realised that I had intruded upon a meal. Bearded monks were sitting on their hunkers, eating with greasy fingers from common bowls. I was about to go, looking apologetic, when a lama with a straggling beard and a kind face came forward. His living quarters, on that bare stone floor, were the acme of discomfort, by Western standards; his "standard of living" the lowest that would keep life together. Yet, if his face meant anything, he was the happy man. When he grinned, his slant eyes disappeared in slits among the mass of fine wrinkles and four long yellow teeth stood out in grand isolation.

He posed for a picture, and when I diffidently offered him ten rupees, grinned more broadly than ever as he took it. Just ten rupees, it seemed, could increase his happiness in that intolerable, soapless loneliness. It was an enigma. Or was it the story of the happy beggar? I went back to Calcutta, the war and my worries, thinking how much I value

plumbing and human society. Even safety from atom bombs would not compensate the average Westerner for life in a lamasery. So common civilised man, conditioned to the ways of the twentieth century, must keep a delicate balance of work, companionship and environment to maintain *his* happiness.

Most important truths are remarkably simple. One outstanding discovery of my travels is that no place I have ever visited offers absolutely ideal surroundings for the sensitive mechanism of the human mind and body. These places include thirty recognised countries and also such spots as Sark, Corsica, Eire, Cyprus, the Goodwin Sands and a coral atoll. We complain bitterly of London's fogs, filth and drizzle. But consider some of the other places.

The romantic islands, for example, that look so tempting on coloured celluloid. In my experience, small islands tend to cause feelings of claustrophobia, stagnation, and frustration in inverse ratio to their size. I do not put this forward as a brilliantly original discovery. It was, in fact, the conclusion of our old friend Robinson Crusoe. Nevertheless, to counteract film propaganda and the "island Paradise" conception, it is, perhaps, worth mentioning that I never yet set foot on a small island which I did not, almost immediately, wish to leave.

This impulse, stimulated by the arrival of German parachutists, arose most urgently in Leros. It applied with almost equal force to Addu, the perfect coral atoll in the Arabian Sea. I went to Addu when the Eastern Fleet were using it in 1943 as a secret hide-out from the Japs, after the bombing of Colombo and Trincomalee. We were not greeted by lovelies shaking straw skirts to lilting melodies, but by a particularly ferocious breed of mosquitoes. The climate was stifling. Only the mosquitoes seemed to thrive. I hobbled about with a poisoned foot, malaria was rife, and the human inhabitants of the island, enfeebled by interbreeding, also suffered from the grotesque distortions of elephantiasis. The best thing about Addu was the view from the air of its perfect horse-shoe, decked with palms.

I am writing this in a choking, freezing London fog, which

has temporarily turned my little house at Barnes into an island, and it gives zest to my fault-finding retrospect. There were no fogs in Iceland when I was there, but it was windy, treeless and barren. South Africa, which attracted with its sunny affluence and variety, repelled with its racial hatreds. Cairo, magic green carpet in the desert, is infested with flies, guides and beggars. Baghdad's brawling alleys have the worst smells in the world. New York is too feverish, Hollywood too extravagant, Paris too soulless, Athens too political. All these places also have their subtle charm, but the chief lesson of my experience is, in a nutshell, that people are so much more important than places. If this seems sententious and sentimental, I am sorry, but defiant. It had to be said. Sentiment, I believe, always trumps cynicism, and my sentiment for people is today stronger than that for places.

If we abandon the quest for a physical Shangri-la, deciding that there are things more important than safety, that beauty and happiness are in the eye and the mind of the beholder, we can instantly agree that the man who put this name up on his seaside bungalow does not deserve to be a laughing stock. But, abandoning Shangri-la, other quests suggest themselves. There is, for instance, the search for the ideal political system, the best "way of life."

Making another excursion into the past, I come to the olive and orange groves of Southern Judea, where, in the days when the English were welcomed, I visited a community of Jewish idealists, in the settlement of Givat-Brenner. Here a thousand Jews from fourteen countries were living in a miniature Communist State. It is important to realise that theirs was a primitive Communism—not the Soviet brand.

Nobody worked for money. They cultivated about four hundred acres and the profits from their fruit and vegetables went into the community chest. Generally, the profits went to the improvement of the settlement and its amenities, but once a year each settler was given about £1 and told to go and have a holiday. Usually he or she would go off to Jerusalem to stay with friends. There was little else that he could do, with no money.

All widows, babies, orphans, old people and a charge upon the little community. My guide pointed out the fact that he had not had to pay a wife's confinement, or to worry about the children. Babies were looked after at a central nursing home, mothers permitted to see them and play with them at specified times. There was no crime, they told me. No man stole a clock. He was thrashed and expelled from the settlement, thrown out into the cold hard world. People earned and spent money—and had a good time doing it.

The leaders of the community claimed that most of their flock were supremely happy. To me they seemed to take their pleasures sadly, and I shuddered at the monotony of family life. Jewish youths were studying Hebrew works in the library hut. Some, for relaxation, sat solemnly round a piano while one of their number played classical pieces. Outside, some other youths were playing a ball game with the deadly seriousness of professional players.

My guide said that many of the Jews in the settlement had escaped from persecution and were now free. They had found freedom and equality. He then took me to a little wooden cabin, where he had been shown a successful enterprise by collecting such items as a table, a few chairs, to have more comforts than his neighbours. Incidentally, it was also a very superior residence. Some of his neighbours were "slumming" in tents. His people's code did not proscribe efforts to get a better life than one's neighbour, presumably by superior ingenuity.

If the United States is an advance copy of the new world as it will be racially, is Givat-Brenner a copy of the new world socially? There are indications in Great Britain today that we are moving in that way.

To compare the austerity and humourless tightness of Givat-Brenner with the gay exuberance and bursting life of the United States may be unfair. Given the choice between the two, the other, I know which I would unhesitatingly choose. Do we need we choose? Is there no possibility of

maintaining a distinctively British way of life which lies somewhere between the two, one that recognises the virtues of family life, retains the stimulus of competition and free enterprise, without sacrificing too heavily to the Moloch of security for all—a security which, in the atom age, may well turn out illusory?

So now, after living in tents, Nissen huts, trenches, empty palazzos and luxury hotels, I am back in my London suburban igloo in Couponland. I am living on rations and in restaurants, filling in forms with dazed exasperation, helping my wife (when unavoidable) with the endless household chores, watching my boys grow up, digging my garden, and living the life of an Englishman in 1949.

In Chapter One I said that life seemed a conspiracy to prevent me from doing what I wanted to do. Sometimes I have defeated the plot, sometimes it has defeated me. But the contest has seemed less important with the passage of time.

I am forty-seven. I think my wife is the most wonderful and longsuffering woman in the world; that my two sons are living proof that there is no need to apply a smoky malacca to young posteriors.

Kind friends tell me that I do not look my age; less kind ones that I look as if I had had "a good time." My face varies in colour from pink to puce according to the circumstances. My eyes and mouth are deep-lined with the legacies of sun and laughter; my shoulders stoop with the legacy of bending over the typewriter. It is my ambition to leave some mark in time's sand behind me, something that will survive my death, however slight it may be, to help future generations.

My body is taut to the tempo of modern life. I walk with it bent half forward, in eagerness to be at journey's end, and then to start off again. I eat and drink too fast. When I wake, I am liable to bounce instantly out of bed, but the time of waking is uncertain. Usually, I fall asleep the instant my head touches the pillow, and have about eight hours' sleep.

The ferocity with which I attacked exercises of all kinds in India has lasted spasmodically. I am thus liable, in



fits and starts, to be doing modified yoga exercises at 7 a.m. or 11 p.m. I am the world's worst golfer, fancy myself to be slightly better at tennis, and swim a reasonable breast stroke. Friends are invariably amused at my bold but ungraceful attempts to dive. All this fails to produce the sylph-like figure; my belly continues to bulge slightly and I have almost ceased to call my double-chin embryonic.

I laugh heartily at my own jokes, loathe people who mistake rudeness for humour, and also those who relate interminable dirty stories. I hate duplicity, ingratitude, meanness, and people who lose their tempers easily. Above all, I detest people who do not do what they say they are going to do. If, for any reason, I offend in this respect myself, I am miserable and penitent.

I rank moral and physical courage before brains and ability, and far above sporting prowess. In the words of the Jain proverb, I think that "A man believes himself to be a hero until he beholds the foe."

Generally speaking, I think the modern over-emphasis on sport is deplorable, but I enter a special caveat for cricket, the sport of sports.

Smoking I regard as a more harmful vice than drinking; smoke-filled rooms are my purgatory. The worst drink in the world is vodka and vermouth, the best early-morning tea, but I think that, on the whole, alcoholic drink is an agreeable social lubricant. I enjoy most kinds of food and drink, but find the pretensions of connoisseurs excessively wearisome. Snobbery in any guise, either intellectual or social, amuses me when it fails to infuriate.

Approaching the end of this confessional, and also the end of this book, I find myself confirmed in the belief that the pursuit of truth, however arduous and elusive the chase, is the most important thing in life, and the most satisfying thing is to love and be loved. Searching among my tattered notebooks, I have come across some wisdom copied from the wall of a Buddhist temple.

"Confidence is the best of relatives."

"Nirvana is the highest happiness."

The truth in contemplative philosophy obsesses me. All the same, I would still book, with a return ticket, on a rocket trip to the Moon, hoping against hope that a rival reporter had not been there first.



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